

By RACHEL FIELD

HIFTY, HER FIRST HUNDRED YEARS

POINTS EAST

GOD'S POCKET

TIME
OUT OF MIND

by

Rachel Field



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To
A. S. P.

*“The heavens are the heavens of the Lord; but
the earth hath he given to the children of men.”*

PSALM 115.

PART I

CHAPTER I

I WAS never one to begrudge people their memories. From a child I would listen when they spoke of the past. Mother often remarked upon it as strange in one so young. But I think I must have guessed, even then, at what is now clear to me, though I have not skill enough with words to make it plain. For I know that nothing can be so sweet as remembered joy, and nothing so bitter as despair that no longer has the power to hurt us. And to me the past seems like nothing so much as one of those shells that used to be on every mantelpiece of sea-faring families years ago along the coast of Maine.

There were two such shells in the parlor of Fortune's Folly. Rissa and Nat and I were never tired of pressing one or the other to our ears to hear how a dwindled thunder of sea still beat in each fluted pink hollow. So I say again, that is how the past seems to me,—a hollow shell out of the mighty sea of Time, which each one of us may press to the ear to drown out the louder clamor of the present. Perhaps it is too childish and fanciful a notion for people to believe in, in these times. Perhaps it only comes of my being so much alone with memories that make both sweet and bitter company.

Except for the Fortune family I should have had another story to set down. Like as not I should not be putting it to paper at all, but telling it to children, and maybe grandchildren, about my own fire. For no one living, I think, but must sometimes wonder at the working out of his life, or who does not say:—"If my mother had not come knocking at such and such a door,—If my father had taken the right hand road instead of the left,—If the tin peddler had waited another hour to come

by,—If I had not worn the sprigged muslin and sash to the strawberry festival, what another sort of creature might I find myself today?" I doubt if any are too stupid or too clever as not to have wasted a thought or so in such useless pastimes. Of late years the habit has grown on me and I often go back over the events, trivial enough in themselves, that brought me here to Little Prospect and bound me from a child to the Fortunes and their proud and difficult ways.

I know what they say of them in the village, and of me as well. But they will say less and less as the years go by and new faces crowd out the old, as the houses of summer people are crowding the farms and homesteads about Little Prospect. For this reason, and because I alone am left of the three who grew up together in Fortune's Folly on the hill, I must set down the true pattern of our lives here on the blank pages of Major Fortune's half-filled ledgers and log-books. It would have angered him, maybe, to know they were put to such use all these years after he entered the names there with such high hope in his heart and pen. Well, he is over his tempers now, and the long pages he left empty are perhaps as good a legacy as any other. Who will read my words in these busy times I do not know. Certainly not the children of Little Prospect who may have heard dark whispers from their mothers and aunts of Kate Fernald and how she has come down in the world. Even Sadie Berry, who took me in and got me work in the post-office, does not guess what I do here alone in my upper room night after night. She seldom climbs her steep stairs and so she does not see how the table is drawn close to the northwest window that I may have the last glow of light that lingers over Nobble Head Narrows for my scribbling. She does not know that once the door is shut behind me my mind takes twenty, thirty, and even forty years in a single stride and I am young again. So we walk backwards to meet the horizons we passed long ago. So we are re-born, and so we live and lean upon ourselves as the honeysuckle shoot climbs down its own stalk when there is nothing higher for it to lay hold on.

The gilt and marble clock that looks like royalty visiting a poor relation will strike in a moment from my pine dresser. Presently a hidden door will swing open in the middle of the gold face and two little enameled figures of woodsmen will come out with a cross-saw and go through the motions of sawing an invisible log.

"Father says they're killing time," Nat told me once as we watched them together in the east parlor. I could not begin to write without mention of the clock, for it must always mark the beginning of time for me, though I was ten years old before I saw its precise small figures and heard its faint chime that seemed to come from the bottom of a deep well.

Before then I lived inland in a sheltered hilly country where I might be yet if it had not been for father's forgetting his jacket the day he drove his last load of apples to the cider-mill nine miles from our farm. He left it behind him by the merest chance. When mother found it over the hitching post he was too far away for me to run after him, and by noon rain was coming down in steady white streamers. It was nearly dark before he drove into the yard again, soaked through and chilled to the bone. Nothing mother could do warmed him,—not mustard, or soapstone, or steaming toddy. The doctor came and the neighbors, but there was no helping him. By another week he was in his grave and mother and I alone in the farmhouse with winter coming on and the livestock more than one woman and a ten year old girl could manage.

He'd had poor crops that year and the one before, and burying him had swallowed up about all there was saved. Neighbors took the horse and cows and pigs off our hands, but what they brought wasn't enough to see us through the winter. So when word came from mother's cousin in Little Prospect that he'd found a place for her as housekeeper at the big place they called "Fortune's Folly" it seemed nothing short of providential. All the neighbors told her so and turned to, to help us go. In spite of her sadness mother was glad of the chance. She'd never liked the lonely farm that father set such store by, and though

she shed some tears when it came to selling the furniture to anyone who would have it, once we were off in the puffing black train with our bags about us and two old trunks stowed in the baggage car, she began to take heart again.

Being housekeeper in a great house like Major Fortune's wouldn't be like coming down in the world. He had sent us money for our fare on the train that would set us within ten miles of our goal, and Cousin Sam had written he wasn't the interfering kind. He wouldn't be likely to take another wife and mother could have things her own way up at the Folly. There'd be a better chance for me there, mother figured, with a district school to go to nearby. Then there were the two Fortune children, a boy and a girl about my own age. It stood to reason I'd pick up genteel ways from them as I wouldn't back on the farm along with dumb beasts and no advantages to mention.

I remember she talked to me about it the better part of the journey as I watched brown fields and frosty ponds and November woods going by the train window. I didn't feel so sure I'd like having advantages, and I dreaded meeting those two young Fortunes. I wasn't easy with other children, being shy and awkward on account of having no playmates but the hens and pigs and the calves that came with the Spring and went off in the Butcher's cart as soon as I'd begun making soft-eyed pets of them. It was a jolting way-train, for in those days there were no fast expresses thundering through the countryside, and a long journey with stops at every sort of a one-horse station. I sat pressed close to the chill pane of glass while mother dozed or woke to tell me all over again that I mustn't hang back and keep to myself now that I was to have two playmates. According to her Fortune's Folly was the largest and most elegant house east of Portland and a landmark up and down the coast. She used to go to Little Prospect when she was a girl and she had never forgotten its white columns and cupola above the spruce woods on the high bluff.

"Fortune's and yeast can't be kept at the bottom," was a saying they had about them, she told me. It is years now since I

have heard it from any lips and soon there will be none left to remember it. "There's no port too far for Fortune pines to cast their shadows," was another she told me that day. It puzzled me at first till she explained that it meant the tall masts of Fortune built vessels which had become a by-word the globe around. But even she spoke darkly of changing times and of how there were more steamboats every year. Steam was well enough on land, she added, but it would never crowd out canvas, no matter what people said. For it stood to reason it was cheaper to make the wind serve you for nothing instead of this dirty coal. I did not bother my head much with what she said, though it is strange to remember her words all these years after as I sit at my window and see the harbor crowded with sail-less vessels and the yellow funnels of yachts going by and the smoke of the steamer from Boston on its morning and evening trips. But that day I was too occupied with new sights to pay proper heed.

We were hungry from our early start and tired with the excitement of goodbyes and all the rumble and jolting. After we had eaten our lunch I fell asleep and so lost my first chance of seeing salt water. It was mid-afternoon when mother roused me. The brakeman was calling "Rockland", and all about us people were reaching for their bags and bundles. I felt stiff and cold from sitting cramped so long beside the window and near to crying as we filed out with the rest. Wagons and men and horses and heaped baggage were all about the platform, and though I could not see beyond the wooden station a keen wind met us at the steps and I felt a sudden sense of the sea against my cheek and lips.

Cousin Sam Jordan had come to meet us in the Fortunes' high black wagon with yellow wheels. But he did not drive the great bay horses harnessed to it. The first black man I had ever set eyes upon stood beside them, holding their tossing heads, reassuring them against the noise of the engine. Later I was to know him well and to call him Bo, as Nat and Rissa did. But that afternoon I hung back in fear of his dark skin, thick lips and flattened nose. He was a great curiosity in the whole region and

had been so since the Major brought him back from the South. That was when he had returned just before the end of the Civil War with his military title; the dusky Bo, and a wife from Philadelphia whose delicate airs and the number of trunks full of finery she brought with her were still a wonder to Little Prospect.

It took considerable manoeuvring on the part of Cousin Sam and the station master to get all our belongings into the wagon, and then it looked as if there would not be room for us beside, certainly not for me and a freckled boy a year or two older. His name was Jake Bullard, and it appeared that he belonged in the Jordan household, for he was younger brother to Cousin Sam's wife, Martha. His unabashed scrutiny increased my shyness, so that I could only cling, speechless to mother's hand as we stood there about the wagon.

"Young ones'll have to ride behind with the things," Cousin Sam decided at last. "Cheer up, Kate, Jake won't eat you!"

He laughed and winked at the boy and before I could protest I was swung up into the back among our familiar pieces of baggage. Jake climbed in beside me with a grin that only added to my dread. But it was growing colder, and there was nothing to do but share the buffalo robe between us. So many things were piled at our backs that I could not see mother or Cousin Sam no matter how I twisted. It made me feel frightened and far away when the horses set off at a smart clip and their hoof beats and the grinding of the wheels drowned out even the sound of voices. There was straw on the floor of the wagon that stuck into my legs and my companion took far more than his share of room. It was a bad beginning and I felt like crying.

But for all that, I shall not soon forget that ride or my first sight of the sea. It came to me without warning for I had been hiding under the buffalo robe to avoid meeting the eyes of the boy named Jake. Some extra freshness of air must have roused me to peer out. As I did so a moist salty wind closed round me. I felt as if I were plunging into space and suddenly my eyes widened to meet a vast and shimmering waste. It was a sea of

tossing quicksilver that I saw, limitless and lonely, in the light of a late afternoon in Fall. Though I have seen it in every mood and color since that day it must always seem most miraculous to me so, stirring with that clear colorlessness which is most truly its own.

Presently the road swerved away from shore and for a mile or two woods closed us in. I had never seen such tall trees of pine and fir and spruce before and I marvelled to see how their ranks of thick-set green could suddenly make twilight all about us. I thought of my mother's words and how she had said there was no port too far for Fortune pines to cast their shadows. In that moment I knew what the saying meant, but I did not know, as I do now, that their shadow had already fallen upon me.

Jake unbent a little on our journey. In spite of our shyness we sat close together under the buffalo robe, and in the growing cold of dusk we were each comforted by the warmth of the other's body. My ignorance of the most commonplace sights, such as anchored ships, wharfs and the black sticks of herring weirs in sheltered coves stirred him to conversation. He grew swaggering as he told me the names of these and of towns and harbors that we passed. As the light dwindled and brightness left the sea I found my eyes straining to fix the outlines of bold headlands and islands on my mind. I listened as Jake named them over, pointing out each darkly humped shape with a superior forefinger. Turnip and Heron islands; the Sisters; Fiddler's Reach and Old Horse Ledges,—it seems impossible that there was ever a time in my life when they were unfamiliar to me.

The Fortune Ship Yard lay halfway to Little Prospect, and we stopped there to water the horses and stretch our legs. By then it was almost dark and the enormous bulk of a vessel on the ways loomed at the water's edge like the gigantic skeleton of some stranded sea-monster. It put me in mind of Jonah and the Whale in our big Bible, but I was much too shy to mention this to Jake even if he had not hurried off to join the men who were busy about the yard. We went in to the brick office to warm our-

selves by the fire in a pot-bellied black iron stove. I had never seen a place so full of books and desks and high stools and the pictures of ships on the walls.

As mother and I stood warming our hands a small, rather stooped man, who then seemed old to me but who could not have been much beyond fifty came forward with a kindly word of greeting. This was my first sight of Henry Willis, the Major's right hand man at the ship-yard. Later I was to understand why the men referred to him as "Fortune's Ballast" because only his steady head and shrewd judgment kept the business prospering under the Major's less practical schemes. But on that afternoon I only knew that the gentleman wore drooping moustaches of faded brown and gold rimmed spectacles which he pushed back on his forehead as he smiled at us in a slow pleasant way. He stood talking to mother in an undertone, so that only half his words came to me. Still I remember he said he was glad that mother had come and that she had brought me along.

"They'll need her," he said, staring at me with near sighted brown eyes. "Too much Fortune in the girl, and not enough of it in the boy. Not that they're a bad pair, Mrs. Fernald, in fact I'd like to see them up to more healthy mischief."

He turned to me again and inquired my age.

"Ten and a half," I managed to stammer, shifting under his gaze.

"About a year older than Nat," he said, "and you'd make two of him. Rissa's eleven and smart's a whip. Yes, she's quite a craft."

I liked Henry Willis then and there though I had not the remotest idea what he meant by that last word. In those days along the coast of Maine and other sea-faring communities scarcely a man, woman or child spoke without some sea-faring phrase creeping in. In a few months' time it came as naturally to me, but on that first evening it was all strange and a little frightening. The peppermint stick he brought from a drawer of his desk proved, however, as sweet as those I had had inland. I was hungry enough to eat it all down, but it seemed wiser to

divide with Jake who scrambled back beside me in the straw.

Jake gobbled his half down in no time, and was less short with me the rest of the way. There was no light now except the queer, wavering gleams from the lantern hung under the wagon, and a faint, wide glimmer on the seaward side of the road. Above the creaking and grinding of wheels and the clop-clop of four pair of hoofs, I could hear the sea on the ledges, like no sound I had ever known before. Was it always like that, I asked Jake timidly?

"Wait till you hear it in the line storm." He told me. "Can't hardly hear yourself holler sometimes. 'Bout half way to flood now. Look," he added, "there's Whale Back Light over beyond the Narrows."

I did not know what the Narrows were then, but I looked where he pointed and saw a speck of brightness, like a nearer star shining across the water. Even now as I look up from the half-written page before me, I can see it through my window. In all these fifty odd years since that November evening I have never been out of sight of its beam, except for spells of fog and storm and the week I traveled to New York for Nat's night of triumph. To me it is as much a part of the night sky as the Great and Little Dipper and the steadfast prick of the North Star.

I remember little more of the journey, for the numbness of my fingers and toes and the soreness of my body braced against the joltings drove other matters from my mind. But at last we made a tremendous clatter going over the boards of a wooden bridge. Dark water gleamed for a moment below and squares of lighted window pane showed high above us before more trees closed in and swallowed them up. The next thing I knew the horses had stopped and someone set me down on my own half frozen feet.

Presently I was in the largest kitchen I had ever seen, thawing out by a tremendous stove. Mother and a plump woman named Annie talked on and on while another younger one they called Rose brought us food that had been warming in the oven.

I drowsed over my plate, too tired from the cold and my long journey to eat with my usual good appetite. Perhaps I slept before the sound of a distant bell roused me.

"There," the woman named Annie exclaimed, "that means he's ready to see you."

Mother started up in a great fluster, brushing off crumbs and smoothing her hair in a way that always filled me with alarm. I hoped she would go alone and I made myself as small as I could beside her. But she jerked me up and polishing my face with her handkerchief hurried me with her out of the kitchen.

We stood in a long room full of heavy dark furniture and books that climbed to the high ceiling. Oil lamps with shades like flowers and a brightly blazing fire filled it with light and warmth. A tall man stood warming himself before the fire, his feet wide apart in polished boots. I heard his deep voice greeting mother and then I hung back knowing that his eyes were upon me.

"So you're Kate Fernald," I heard him saying. "A square-rigged girl and no mistake!"

I was not naturally concerned with my looks, but his words went through me like a splinter of ice. Not that they were so much in themselves. It was the amused mockery of his voice that chilled me. In that fraction of time it took for him to say them and for his eyes to find me, I was suddenly aware of my stockiness under the new blue woolen dress that was too long at the hem and sleeves. To save time and trouble mother had had my mop of sandy hair cropped close only a few days before. I could feel my ears turning scarlet without so much as a wisp to cover them. My heart pounded in furious misery as I stood silent and flushed before him.

"Major Fortune wants to shake hands with you, Kate," I heard mother whispering to me. "Don't stand there like a ninny."

She shoved me forward and I felt a large hand close over mine. Another hand tilted my chin up and I saw for the first time the face that I was to know and dread for the next dozen

years of my life. A handsome face it was, even then in his middle age; the cheek bones high and prominent; the nose sharp as the bowsprit of one of his own ships; and the eyes steely gray under heavy brows. He wore the moustache and side whiskers that were the fashion then in the mid-seventies, and these were still light brown though his hair showed plenty of gray. I know now that he treated mother with generosity and consideration that night. It was only the sight of my sturdy body in such contrast to Nat's frailness that made him resent me as he did. But the memory persists. Even after all these years I can still turn hot and cold remembering his look and voice.

"Clarissa! Nathaniel!" He spoke shortly, dropping my hand and dismissing me as if I had been a sack of potatoes.

Two figures rose from the other end of the room and came towards me. We met by the rosewood piano, the first I had ever set eyes on, and the harp catching glints of firelight on its gilded frame and strings. Not by mere chance, it seems to me now, did we meet by those two instruments that were to have so strange a part in our three lives. The little tin-type that the photographer in Portland took that winter stands on my dresser, but I need not cross the room to refresh my memory of the way they looked that night. I can see each sprig of Rissa's patterned green challis, and the half anxious, half amused pucker on Nat's forehead as we stood in shy silence together. Clarissa was eleven then, a year and some months older than I, and as the Major liked to point out with pride, "clipper built". Her slimness and grace were marked even in the bunched and draped dress which was then in style. I had never seen its like and that and her grave beauty filled me with awe. She was fair, like her father, with a cloud of crinkled, light brown hair that grew down in a deep point on her forehead. This gave her face the shape of a violet leaf, for her chin was tapering and her eyes, gray as the Major's but softer, were set wide apart. A narrow band of black velvet tied her hair and her cheeks were faintly colored like the outer petals of a white rose.

But it is Nat and his impish delicacy that I remember best.

It was true as Henry Willis had said that afternoon, I would have made two of him though he was not a full year younger. Over the fireplace hung the portrait of a lady in an oval gilt frame and I knew without being told that this was his dead mother whose very image he bore. Everything was peaked and startled about his face,—brows like two black feathers above brown, merry eyes; tumbled spikes of dark hair, and a small triangular chin.

"Hello," he said abruptly in a curiously deep voice, and put out his hand to me. I took it without answering and as we touched our fingers together the clock began to strike on the mantelpiece. I saw the little figures of the woodsmen come out and begin to saw away at their unseen log. To my excited, overtaxed mind the notes of the chime and his voice became one, as if he and time were to be somehow bound forever to me.

But what he said next was a very childish and simple question.

"How old are you?"

One other incident of that evening which is clear in my mind, came about through my awkward shyness. We three still stood round the piano, ill at ease as children will be at first meeting. I could see that mother was nearly through her talk with the Major, and I turned to join her. As I did so my hand brushed the nearest ivory and black keys. The sound twanged in the firelit room and I saw Nat go white and dart one of those looks at his sister that I was to know so well later on. She made no sign save for a widening of her eyes. I saw Major Fortune look our way with a slightly annoyed expression, but beyond that he took no notice. I could feel an unnamed dread gradually fading out of the room as he went on talking to mother. But I knew without a word being spoken that it had been a close shave, and that in some way it had to do with the piano.

CHAPTER II

A good many stories and sayings had gathered about Fortune's Folly. Jake Bullard took pains to tell me some when mother and I would spend a Sunday in Little Prospect with Cousin Sam and his family. I heard them again at the district school where I went alone each day with my books and lunchpail. The other scholars were not a little awed when they found out that I lived in the great white house on the bluff and talked and played with the mysterious girl and boy they only saw riding to the store and post-office or sitting in the Fortune pew at church.

One of these stories went back to Indian times and to a Medicine Man who had chosen the site for his heathen doings. They said he had made human sacrifices there, and that there were still heaps of bones and skulls under the cellar. They said, too, that he had known a spell to summon up storms, and you could still hear his tom-tom beating through particularly wild ones. Nat and Rissa and I always used to listen for it and imagine that we heard the drum-beats after I brought the story back to them from school, and once when we found a chipped Indian arrow-head where a new garden bed was dug, we were convinced of its truth. But Medicine Man or not there had been plenty of Indians about when the first Nathaniel Fortune took possession of the land. He had held a high commission in the French and Indian wars, and after the fall of Louisburg had been rewarded for his bravery by a huge land-grant.

That first Nathaniel Fortune had been Rissa and Nat's great-grandfather and it was said that he and George Washington had fought side by side in their young days and had called one another by their Christian names. However that may have been,

the same artist had painted portraits of them in Continental blue and buff. The Fortune painting was sold years ago. They tell me it hangs now in a great museum, and is counted a rare treasure. But we three children found him a familiar sharer of our secret doings in the east parlor, for the lifelike look of his painted eyes always made it seem that he was watching us.

"Great Grandfather's got his eye on us!" Nat used to say, and it was true. Even the terrier, Frisky, felt something alive about the canvas. I have seen her go into fits of barking with her head cocked up at the portrait.

That first Nathaniel Fortune might have been a high up man in politics if he had cared to take himself to Philadelphia after the Revolution. He could have matched wits with Washington and Jefferson and Franklin and the rest there, but he would not leave his northeast corner of New England and his timberlands that would one day take the Fortune name around the globe. So all his strength and foresight went into keeping his thousands of acres clear of entanglements and squatter claims. His grants lay on either side of Fortune's Creek, that fine waterway down which logs might be floated from far inland, and from which power might be had to turn them into lumber. He was one who knew how to make tides and trees serve him. "Regular Fortune Luck" became a common phrase among the scattered settlements on the Maine coast even in his own day.

The wife he brought to the great house that had been called his "Folly" almost before its first beams were raised, hailed from the region about Castine. It is a pity no artist painted her, for her strain of French and Indian blood must have lent picturesqueness to any portrait. Her high cheek bones have cropped out in later generations of Fortunes; even young Nat inherited them, though otherwise he was his mother all over again. They were as plain as could be in the picture of the second Nathaniel, Rissa and Nat's Grandfather.

His portrait, nearly twice the size of the earlier one, had nothing arresting about it. We children never looked up from our play, half fearful of finding his eyes bent upon us. It was a

more ambitious affair, done, I suppose, by some traveling artist. What I remember chiefly about it, is the arrangement of small objects on a table beside him, all carefully chosen to suggest his tastes and business. His hand rested on a globe, while on the crimson tablecloth were spread out compass and charts and the model of a sailing vessel fully rigged. Even his tombstone in the family lot bore witness to his calling, for an anchor was cut into the marble with the inscription:—"They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters, these see the works of the Lord." Certainly he took to shipping as a duck to water; cut his teeth on a piece of tarred rope, and had been twice round the Horn before he was twenty-one. He lived in the hey-day of shipping and died just as the shadow of smoke from stack and funnel was beginning to appear on the horizon. There were no swifter vessels with taller masts or greater spread of canvas than those that left the Fortune ship-yard in his day. He was proud of them and of their records, and more than half of the pictured vessels that hung in the hall and study of Fortune's Folly were of his building.

I can remember still the sound of their lovely names as Rissa and Nat and I spelled them off on days when the weather kept us indoors. "Comet"; "Sea Garland"; "Wild Deer"; "Aurora B."; "The Maypole"; "Tropic Bird", and "Fortunate Star", I can say them yet and see in the mind's eye the painted dark blue water, the pointing prows and the proud sweep of canvas. Most of the curiosities we loved best had come in the hold of one or another of these ships. The stone Buddha that came out to sit between delphinium and lily clumps each summer had been brought in one; the teakwood chest and carved ivory chessmen in another, and the French enamel clock with the little woodsmen as well. Rissa's best summer dress was of wrought India muslin; and her winter one of Chinese crepe had come that way. Her petticoats were edged with real Hamburg, and she had enough to fit out half a dozen girls her age.

After I had been a month at The Folly I came to take Rissa's finery as a matter of course, and to accept as her brother did,

her father's indulgence of her. She was the veritable apple of Major Fortune's eye. He felt he could unbend a little with such a pretty daughter. But a son was an altogether different proposition. Mother and Cousin Martha Jordan used to say he took Nat hard. It was natural, I can see now, as I couldn't then. He was a grim, close mouthed man, who had married late in life, and had never quite shaken off the ravages of malaria that had nearly taken him in a Southern camp during the Civil War. He must have loved his wife, for he mourned her sincerely. Young Nat's being so frail and puny was a cross to him, but he could have put up with that better than his being so different in his mind from the rest of the Fortunes. The boy was his hold on the future. He had been brought up to think in terms of timber, in canvas and cargoes and such-like, and he'd made up his mind that his son should keep the name one to be reckoned with on the coast. He wouldn't admit, not then or afterwards, that Nat could do that in any other way than with ships and lumber.

So it was always Rissa who was sent to beg favors of her father. Mostly she got her way with him in all but one particular. It was not long before I found out what this was and from the day I did we three were joined in league against him. There is nothing so binding, whether one happens to be young or old, as some secret shared in common. I should not, perhaps, have given myself to aiding and abetting them if it had been Rissa's battle, and not Nat's that we fought by strategy. But from the first evening when we had stood together about the piano I was no more than putty in the hands of the queer, dark eyed boy.

The trouble all came of Rissa's taking music lessons and Nat's being forbidden to touch the piano. Almost before he was out of petticoats those black and ivory keys drew him as if they were magnets. Annie Button told me once that his mother had been gifted the same way and would play by the hour there in the east parlor. She said that the Major tried to break Nat of it from the first. He'd rap him hard across the knuckles every time he caught him there. He felt it was no kind of thing for a son and tried to crush it out of the little fellow. But by hook or by crook

Nat would contrive to pick out tunes on it and even to try his hand at the harp. He was always humming music under his breath and that was another thing that his father couldn't abide. Sometimes after they'd had a terrible set-to over it and the Major had lost his temper, Nat would get one of his spells and mope about the place as pale and limp as if he'd been struck with dry-wilt. It seemed as if those two were born to be at loggerheads.

Well, about a year before we came to live at The Folly Rissa started to take music lessons. Miss Ada Joy, from down in Little Prospect, who played the organ at church and who had studied in Boston in her young days, came up once a week to teach her. The Major thought it was high time Rissa learned some accomplishments, but he gave orders that Nat wasn't to put his nose out of his own room the whole hour the music lesson went on. He didn't trust him much, so he arranged for it to be on Friday afternoons when he was home from the ship-yard and could see no liberties were taken. Rissa learned fast and kept to her practising faithfully, but she never had her brother's gift. She knew it herself and would gladly have given him her chance. She'd have cut off her ten fingers for Nat if he'd wanted them, I'll say that for Rissa.

It wasn't till that first summer that I found out how those two were contriving between them. Before then I was away at school till almost supper time and my only chance to see Nat and Rissa was evenings when they'd sneak out to play games with me by the kitchen table or I would be called in to keep them company by the east parlor fire. I dreaded going there unless it happened that Henry Willis had driven up to take supper and stay the night. Now that the weather was warmer and the evenings long he was much there. He was the kindest of men, and though the Major and he went off to the study across the hall as soon as the meal was over, his presence was always welcomed by the three children who ran out to meet him when he drove up. Having no wife or family of his own he made more of us than most. But for all his easy, gentle ways he could

stand up to the Major as no other man dared. Certainly he had a far better head for the shipping business as it turned out later.

I remember so well the evening in June, just after the last school term was over, when he drove up with presents on the seat beside him,—the first bunch of bananas I had ever seen; a book of fairy tales in green and gold binding, and a box of red firecrackers. I could hear them all laughing together in the dining room as I helped mother and Rose in the big pantry. Nat's peals came so clear and happy sounding that even mother took notice.

"He's a queer one," she said to Rose, "nothing halfway about him."

"Sometimes he acts spell-set to me," Rose answered shortly as she turned to carry in the roast.

"Well, I wouldn't go that far," mother put in mildly, "it's more as if he wasn't pitched right. Like a see-saw, up one minute and down the next, that's young Nat all over."

I knew even then what she meant. I had come to dread the sudden clouding over of his face, like an east wind that will steal the blue out of sea and sky all in a moment. By the same token his gaiety passed all bounds.

I was sent for after the meal to eat a banana from the bunch Henry Willis had brought, and the two men having taken their cigars and the decanter of port into the study across the hall, Rissa, Nat and I sat down to a game of dominoes. But though we spread them out on the table under the lamplight we dawdled over them and talked in half whispers instead.

"Uncle Henry brought the book and the firecrackers all the way from Boston," Rissa told me.

"I wish he'd given me the book and you the firecrackers," Nat complained. "They make too much noise."

"Well, never mind, Fourth of July's a long way off yet. Kate, father's promised I'm to christen the 'Rainbow'."

"Can I go when you do it?" I asked, for I was still not certain of what I might and might not share with these two.

"Everyone'll go," Nat broke in, "but it won't be till Septem-

ber. That's why Mr. Sandford isn't coming to give us lessons anymore. They'll need him all the time down at the yards."

I rejoiced over this news. It meant that the three of us would be free of lessons for the summer. Mr. Sandford was a grave young accountant who came up every other day to tutor them in arithmetic, writing, grammar, and Latin, for the Major had no opinion of the district school and its troop of village boys and girls.

"Listen," Nat whispered, his dark head cocked towards the hall. "They're having words."

"Uncle Henry's talking back to him," Rissa told me. "He mostly does when he comes back from Boston."

They had forgotten us and their voices came clear through a blue fog of tobacco smoke. It was the first time I had ever heard men talking together of anything besides crops and cattle or maybe town politics round the stove in Trundy's General store. I knew their words were not intended for our ears, and so I listened with guilty intentness. No doubt that is why they have stayed by me to this day, like the print of a fern or leaf on some rock that once was clay.

"Well, Nathaniel," Henry Willis was saying, "I'd advise you to take up the Foster bid for the 'Rainbow'. Not that you're likely to take advice from me this time anymore than last, but I'm bound to give it to you all the same."

I could hear the shuffling of papers before the Major replied.

"We didn't do so badly last quarter, Henry. We'll make a fair profit when they settle those last payments on the 'Yankee Belle'."

"*When* they settle,—you mean *if* they do. I tell you I know what I'm talking about. I saw and heard enough in Boston last week to set me figuring. Why I haven't seen old Jenkins so down in the mouth since the Atlantic Cable was laid and he knew there'd be no more betting on cargoes. Rotch and Hammond closing their yards ought to show you the way the wind's blowing."

"All the more business for the rest of us, Henry. That stands to reason."

"Business, yes, if you're willing to take small bids and stick to the fishing and coasting trade. They're what's kept us going the last three years."

"I'm not building the 'Rainbow' to go to the Banks or carry timber between here and New Orleans. She's going to be the finest five masted vessel we've built in years and I won't have her turned into a coasting tub."

"If you're planning to back her for foreign trade you might as well dump the money off Old Horse Ledges and be done with it."

"You're as fidgety as an old hen when it comes to taking chances!" A growing note of annoyance had come into Major Fortune's voice. "Besides, it's the looks of the thing I care more about than the money. I can always count on the timber lands to carry any losses we might have before she pays for her first voyage."

"I thought that was what you had in the back of your mind, and Joe Sargent let out to me yesterday you'd talked to him about selling off another hundred acre lot of the best woods. I told him he couldn't have understood you right."

We could hear a chair scrape and there was a long silence before any answer came.

"Well, I didn't commit myself to him or anyone else. But I thought I might bring the price up by giving out I'd had other offers for it. After all, it's ready money——"

"For you to throw away on more ships to lie idle at the wharves, same's they're rotting now in Salem and Newburyport. This isn't yesterday. Steam's here to stay."

"What if it is? Our yards are still open."

"And they'll stay open if you'll stick to building schooners and fishing smacks and forget your clippers and barks. Your future's in timberlands now, and if you're as shrewd a man as your grandfather Fortune was, you'll hang on to every acre you've got."

We three moved closer together around the table. It was somehow unnatural to hear the Major being talked back to. Nat hugged his knees and began to shake with spasms of soundless laughter. Rissa frowned and put her finger to her lips. It was no time to remind her father of our presence. But when Nat was able to stop laughing, he went into a fit of hiccoughs and grew scarlet in the face trying to stop them by holding his breath. It ended by his exploding in a loud report that sent us all into a panic. Rissa caught his hand and hurried him up the stairs to bed, while I waited with beating heart behind the portières. We need not have been so fearful, for as it turned out, the two men never so much as came to the study door. After awhile I stole out and began putting away the scattered dominoes, which is how I came to hear the last of their argument.

"I'll have to give the Foster offer an answer tomorrow," Henry Willis was saying, "I can't keep them waiting any longer."

"You tell them the 'Rainbow' isn't for sale. I've got other plans for her."

"That's final, Nathaniel?"

"Yes, and you can put some extra hands on tomorrow. I'm counting on the launching for the first week in September."

"Then that means I'd better begin drawing up the papers for that hundred acre deal." Henry Willis' voice sounded tired and flat. Though only half their words were clear to me then, I guessed, as children will, that something tremendously important had happened within my earshot.

CHAPTER III

ON THE shelf beside my bed are some half dozen books that I have kept close to my hand for many years, and one of them is the green and gold book of fairy tales Henry Willis brought to Rissa from that trip to Boston. I have only to open it again to summon up the delight of those long, still afternoons when we read it from cover to cover in the dimness of the old boathouse by the salt inlet. "And it was summer, warm, delightful summer"—so ends the story of Kay and Gerda and the Snow Queen, and so it must always be for me as I turn the pages.

We each had our favorites, but Rissa loved best "The Wild Swans". She always chose to read that one aloud, and her face would grow flushed under her falling hair as she read of that young Princess whose love for her brothers was so great that she suffered muteness and sentence of death to weave the nettle coats to free them of the spell that had turned them into wild swans. But for Nat it was always "The Nightingale" that he must hear over and over again. I can see his eyes now, dark and enormous, as Rissa read about the poor Emperor dying in his palace of a strange malady, and his courtiers jabbering about his bed.

"Music! Music! the great Chinese drum!" he cried, "so that I may not hear all they say!"

"And they continued speaking, and Death nodded like a Chinaman to all they said."

"Music! Music!" cried the Emperor. "You little precious golden bird, sing, sing!"

But it was not the golden bird who had compassion on him. It was the little, live nightingale on a spray outside the window come back to save the Emperor.

Once long after we were grown, Nat and I had reason to remember that tale and take it to our hearts again.

But we did not sit cooped up in the boathouse always. We saved that for sultry afternoons or days of rain and fog. Late June was wild strawberry time and mother saw to it that I picked plenty for preserving. There were fine large strawberries in the garden, but the wild ones were held a special delicacy and I was good at finding and picking. Sometimes we persuaded mother to put us up a lunch and Rissa and Nat spent the day with me roaming the half cleared pastures and the fields on either side of Fortune's Creek. A twelve foot tide filled and emptied itself there twice a day, and at the highest flood-tides when the moon was at its full in June and September, the water almost came over the wooden bridge that crossed it just below The Folly. It was a proper place for digging clams when the tide was out and the water shrunk to a narrow channel between brown mud flats. Some of the Major's cattle grazed thereabouts, but for the most part it was deserted, being too far for village boys to venture except by dory. Such wild strawberries grew in those tidewater meadows as I have never seen the like of before or since. Till well into July my fingers were stained rosy and smelled delicious.

Rissa and Nat liked to go with me on these long expeditions, though they were more fitful berry pickers than I. Rissa was always upsetting her basket and losing the best she had gathered, and Nat often forgot and put them into his mouth instead of into my pail. I had learned to strip the hulls as I picked and I tried to show them how, but somehow they would leave them on and I would have theirs to hull all over again. Still, I did not mind that, being glad of their company. It was seldom that we met anyone on these jaunts, and Nat could sing and hum to his heart's content. Jake Bullard had made me a willow whistle that spring, one he had cut himself from the old tree in the schoolhouse yard. I had given it to Nat and he always carried it in his pocket when we went off berrying. As soon as we were out of ear shot of the house he would have it to his lips, trying

to imitate the birds and making queer little tunes that sounded like brook water going over pebbles and rushy places. He could take even that home made thing and make it give out sweet, queer snatches of music. But it drove him wild sometimes because he couldn't get all the notes he wanted out of it, no matter how he fluttered those thin fingers of his over the little holes.

One day towards the end of June we decided to take the dory and go higher up the inlet than we had been before. We had picked the best of the strawberries in the nearby fields and the tide was right for just such an expedition. It was half-way to flood and running strong from the sea, so we would have it with us going up, and by mid-afternoon it would carry us back without much rowing. Rissa and Nat were better at handling oars than I, but I made up for lack of skill by having more strength and endurance. We said nothing of our plan at the house, for though we were allowed to paddle near shore in the dory, the two young Fortunes were not supposed to go far by themselves. Their father was busy in his study, going over a lot of papers and letters that Bo had brought up from the village the night before, and mother luckily made no objections to putting up our lunch. She did, though, notice Nat's high spirits, for he would burst out singing and skipped about like something possessed. I thought surely she'd suspect us of mischief, but she only shook her head and told him not to wear himself out before the dew was off the grass.

"The little bird that sings in the morning the old cat will eat before night," was all she said as she spread our bread and butter and gave us a pail of milk and three tin cups.

That was a morning to remember. It was one of those days they call a dry-easter, when the sun is stronger than the wind that brings fog, and all the islands and far headlands stand out clear enough to touch with your forefinger. Clumps of delphinium were blue as driftwood blaze round the heathen Buddha in the garden and cinnamon roses were pink and lilies golden all round the house. The hum of bees in them sounded like the sea in the mantelpiece shells, and a hummingbird was

there, too, its wings spinning a tremulous rainbow wheel. Everything shone with summer and sun. The sea was polished like a wide blue dancing floor, and the resin on the spruce cones high overhead glittered like Christmas tinsel. Pure joy ran through me, swifter than the tide under the wooden bridge. We caught each other by the hand and ran together down the long driveway to the water's edge.

We got ourselves and the lunch and baskets into the old pumpkin colored dory and pushed off. Nat was in the bow, his face pointing upstream like a small, eager figurehead. That was the way I knew he looked though I could not see him, my back being bent over the oars in the middle seat. Rissa sat astern, holding the ropes of a sort of rudder that Annie's husband, George Button, had rigged there. She looked like a picture, I thought, in a lilac chambray dress and white sunbonnet. Under its frilled edge I could see soft rings of pale brown hair that was golden where the sun struck across it. She did not grow tan as Nat did after long days in the sun and wind, and though I had as many freckles as there are stars on the milky way, try as I would I couldn't find even one on the bridge of her straight nose. The girls from Little Prospect made remarks about her at school. They said she was proud and stuck up; but I would never listen to them. Proud she was, and set in her ways, yet I couldn't call her vain. It was the way she was fashioned, like a fine piece of china or some ship that wears the look of proud hands that have made it. If she had gone barefoot in my old checked gingham made over from mother's, she would have contrived to give herself an air. It was her right to be lovely and to move with grace. It came as naturally to her as breathing.

"Put up the oars and let the tide serve us, Kate," Nat begged me. "We've gone miles already."

That was hardly true, but having the tide with us was a help and before long we were in country altogether new to me. Sometimes the woods grew close to the water on either side and then there would be more marshes and open fields. Nat played

on his whistle and presently we were all startled by a tremendous splashing from some low, weedy ledges.

"Seals!" Rissa cried and motioned me to pull in the oars.

Several sleek brown heads were bobbing in the water only a few yards from the dory, and at least half a dozen other wet shapes were moving on the ledge. I could scarcely tell wet fur and smooth flippers from low-tide kelp, but I held my breath to see them go plopping and splashing into the water so near us. Now that the oars no longer dipped they seemed untroubled by our presence. We even talked together in whispers without disturbing them at their wallowings.

"They're not really seals?" I asked.

Rissa nodded.

"Not like the kind Miss Ada Joy has for her Sunday jacket?"

"Yes," Rissa was sure. "They come here in summer. There used to be lots round Fiddler's Reach, and Seal Rocks, too, before they killed them off there."

A round shining head with two startled eyes rose beside us only to go under again. I felt suddenly frightened and turned to Nat.

"They'll never find them here," he whispered back to me, "if we don't tell George and Bo, and we won't."

Presently he put the whistle to his lips and blew ever so softly into it. Hardly a thread of sound came out at first and the seals went on swimming and sunning themselves. Rissa and I leaned over the boat side straining our eyes while Nat blew one of his tunes. As he made it come louder, I saw one wet head lift from its place on the ledge. Another followed, and then the first that had given sign, rose a little out of the kelp. A flipper waved, something brown and shining moved softly, wetly, as sea weed sways in a current. My heart seemed to stop beating as the truth came over me. The seal was keeping time to Nat's music.

But the tide was taking us up-stream as tides will. Kelp and brown heads and wet flippers all grew together as we watched.

"Did you see?" Nat could hardly contain himself. "It kept time with me. I made it."

"Same as if it was dancing,—almost."

"Bo told me he'd heard they liked fiddling, but I didn't think they'd notice a whistle. Oh, Nat!" Rissa hugged her knees rapturously, "you did it!"

Once, years afterward in a book I was dusting in the Major's library, I came upon the picture of a man named Orpheus in Greek robes. Underneath was a line of poetry about how he could make the birds and beasts and all creation listen when he played on his lute. It always put me in mind of Nat and the seals that day of our expedition in the old dory. I knew then, that he had power above the rest of us. Even the great night when he stood up before that packed houseful and held the musicians bending to his will, and all those people in the hollow of his outstretched hand, I was never more aware of it.

We ate our lunch in a shady place under old trees for the sun stood high and hot in the noon sky. Then I went afield picking strawberries for I knew I must have something to show for the day and neither of those two were of a mind to help me. They went off together to see if they could find a cave they had heard was somewhere about, and we agreed to meet where the dory was tied fast to an old spruce that was half tumbled into the water. The grass in the field sloping down to the inlet was long and daisies and devils-paint-brush and single summer dandelions broke in a sea of white and gold and copper against my bare feet, I had to push aside the burnt grass to find my strawberries, but they were larger and more scarlet than any I had found before. Berry after berry beckoned me till I lost all count of time. My basket was almost filled when I heard faint cries and started back to the water.

"Kate! Kate!" The long drawn wail of their voices told me something must be wrong, and I hurried on breathless and stumbling.

I came upon the other two by the fallen tree, their eyes large and scared.

"It's gone, Kate," Nat cried out to me, "it's got away."

We stood and stared at the empty water.

"You didn't tie it fast enough," Rissa turned on me with flushed cheeks and tears on her long lashes. "You're from back country and don't know how to make a proper half hitch."

For a moment I was too spent and stunned to speak. I knew I had not been the one to tie the rope. I had seen Nat's quick brown fingers throw it over the tree roots.

"That's not so, Clarissa Fortune," I burst out with the first breath I could summon. "You've no call to blame me."

"Well, I didn't touch it and Nat would know better. I suppose you think it untied itself?" She looked suddenly grim like her father.

Nat gave me a long, anxious look and I hadn't the heart to betray him.

"We'll never get home now," Rissa fumed. "It's miles by the shore and we'd get lost trying to find the back road. Besides there's a swamp between. George lost one of our calves there last summer. The bog just sucked it right under."

All the brightness drained out of the June afternoon though the sun still came warm through the branches overhead.

"We'll have to find some way back." I said at last. They both looked so forlorn I couldn't go on being angry, though I still felt sore at Rissa's words. "Doesn't anybody live round here?"

"Crazy Tim and his mother do," Nat broke in. "Father lets them have what's left of the old mill that burned."

"But, Nat," I saw Rissa give a little shiver, "they're as queer as queer. Bo says she's kind of a witch and anyway it's miles farther on."

"He's got a boat, though," Nat reminded her. "I've seen him fishing in it sometimes. I don't believe she's as queer as all that. Bo just believes in spooks and things because he's black."

"We couldn't walk all the way we came," I put in. "It would take us till after dark. What time do you suppose it is now?"

We squinted up at the sun and decided it was past mid-afternoon. No more minutes to waste in wondering what to do next, so off we set with our faces turned up river. We had to pick our way along the edge and sometimes the going was rough

and difficult. With the river brimful now it was necessary sometimes to crash through underbrush and criss-cross roots in the wooded parts. And then we would come to mud and marshy bits that were even harder to skirt. I had the best of it in these spots with my bare feet, for Nat and Rissa's shoes were soon mud caked and oozing. An overhanging branch flew back and gave Nat a long scratch across his face. He bit his lips to keep from crying at the pain and when Rissa and I tried to wash it with her handkerchief wet in the water he winced at the sting of salt on the open place. Then Rissa stumbled on a snarl of roots and twisted her ankle. She struggled on as best she could, but I could see the flesh swelling above her shoe top. She grew whiter round the mouth as we pressed on.

"It must be round the next bend," Nat kept saying in a kind of monotonous chant. "It's bound to be."

They had both seen the ruins of the old mill from the water, and they were sure it hadn't been so far. I think all three of us prayed secretly under our breath. I know I did, at the head of our forlorn little mud-streaked troupe. One wooded point after another kept appearing as we toiled on, too tired and dogged now for more than an occasional brief word.

"It must be soon," Nat insisted as we struck into another sunny field of burnt coarse grass. I opened my mouth to answer him when a stab of pain shot through the calf of my leg.

"Hornets! Look out!" I had just presence of mind enough to scream before a black cloud rose up out of nowhere all round me.

I fled screaming, beating them off with both hands and fierce red hot stings tapping at my face and arms and legs. Instinct led me to the water and I plunged in up to my knees in a blind panic of pain and terror. Of course I lost my footing and went down with a wild splash. I thought my end had come, but I had struggled out before they could reach me. I had screamed in time for them to escape the hornets, but already my face and neck and arms were swelling and my bare legs showed great red bumps in spite of the mud already plastered there. Tears of pain

began to squeeze out of my fast closing eyes as I stood before them. I don't know what we should have done if at that moment we had not heard the sound of distant chopping and a voice raised in song.

"Listen," Nat and Rissa cried out together in shrill relief, "we're there. That's old lady Phibben."

Through a blur of pain I could hear that high old voice lifted to the thud of an axe on a chopping block in a familiar hymn:—

*"In vain with lavish kindness,—clop! clop!
The gifts of God are strown;
The heathen in his blindness,—clop! clop!
Bows down to wood and stone"*

Nat dropped my hand and went ahead as more wood splintered to the words.

*"Shall we whose souls are lighted
With wisdom from on high,—clop! clop! clop!
Shall we to men benighted—clop! clop!
The lamp of light deny?"*

I could hear Nat's voice breaking in, polite and eager.

"I'm Nat Fortune, please, and this is Clarissa, and that's Kate, and we're in great trouble."

We couldn't have come to a better person for help as it turned out later. Old Lady Phibben left off her chopping and hymn singing and led us indoors then and there. At the time I wasn't able to see much out of my eyes, but they told me afterwards that she had the part of the mill that hadn't burned fixed as nice as could be, with braided rugs on the floor and a stove and tables and chairs. I knew there was a bed, with pillows and cool sheets for she had me on it, and my clothes off in no time.

"Dear, dear," I could hear her commiserating above me, "You must have stirred 'em up considerable from the looks. Berrying, I expect you were, and walked right into a nest."

At that I began to cry afresh, her words putting me in mind of my basket of strawberries that I knew was gone for good. I could hear Nat and Rissa explaining our plight to her as she rattled tins and crockery in another part of the room, but I felt too despairing to join in.

"Why to be sure," I heard her answer them, "My son'll fetch you home in his boat soon as he's back. He's gone up river with a load of clams. Why, yes, Tim ought to be here by sundown."

Presently she brought over cloths and water and began to wipe away the mud from my face and neck and arms and legs. Her hands were quick and gentle, though they hurt me I was so sore and throbbing.

"Yes," she said as she worked over me, "you're the kind they hitch their stings right into. The mud helped some, and this salve's the best thing to draw the poison out."

To this day I have no idea what remedy she rubbed into my smarting flesh, but help it did. After she was through I lay back among the covers, less frantic with pain. She gave some to Rissa, too, to rub on her ankle, and after awhile we all quieted down to wait for her son Tim.

"She's nice," Nat whispered in my ear. "It's her nose and no teeth make her look queer. And we'll get home tonight even if he is kind of crazy."

We had a long wait, and I couldn't eat any of the ginger cookies and root beer old lady Phibben brought out for us. Nat got out his whistle and played for her and he and Rissa chatted as they never did up at The Folly. I felt too miserable to put in more than a word or two, though I listened as I lay all sticky and swollen. Just how they got talking of fortune telling I cannot remember, but it surprised me to know that Old Lady Phibben could tell them with cards. It seemed queer to me that she could do that and still sing hymns with such fervor. Nat and Rissa sat very close to her while she dealt a pack on the old table. I only caught snatches of what she said, but when she told

them that there were other ways of telling the future I grew more interested.

"If I do you're not to say a word about it at home," she cautioned when they begged her to tell theirs. "Not to your father or anybody in the village for I can't afford to get a bad name."

"We won't say a word. We promise not to." Nat and Rissa agreed, their voices sunk to excited whispers.

"Well, mind you don't forget." She warned them. "It's bad luck to pass a fortune on, unless you want to lose the best and have dust and ashes to show for it."

Neither of them spoke she sounded so solemn, but I heard them draw their chairs closer to hers. I lay still and listened with all my might. I could not see well enough out of my smarting eyes to make out what she did, though they told me afterwards that she made them spread out their hands on the table, first palms out and then closed over a round pebble that was smooth and clear as glass.

"That's my lucky stone," she explained, "I've had it since I was knee-high to nothing. Now then, ladies first."

It was so still in the room as Rissa spread out her hands that we could hear the soft slap-slap of the tidewater against the stonework of the mill and a great droning of bees about a syringa bush, heavy with bloom just outside. I can smell that thick, sweet fragrance now and hear again her old voice speaking to Rissa.

"Soft, pretty hands you've got, child," she said, "and they'll touch precious things, silver and gold someday. You'll go a long way off from here, but you'll come back. Now, close your fingers over the lucky stone. Lord, what a grip you've got. You'll never let go of what's your own. Take care you don't hold too fast."

"But I want to know who I'm going to marry," Rissa broke in with something of annoyance in her voice. "And where I'll go, and how many children I'll have?"

Old Lady Phibben told her a long rigmarole that I have long since forgotten. But when Nat put out his hands I pricked up my ears to hear what she would tell him.

"Well, well," she exclaimed, "that's a pair of bird claws and no mistake, but they'll hold winds and waters and beating hearts in them before you're done. Yes," her voice grew so low I could hardly make out the words, "you'll be spreading them out in glory someday in a high place. Put your trust in the thin black stick and it will carry you through. But first there'll be the white horses and you watch out for them. They'll lay you low and try to break you if they can. Hold the lucky stone now."

It clattered in the stillness, and I heard Rissa cry out sharply.

"Oh, Nat, you dropped it!"

"Tutch! Tutch!" Old Lady Phibben clucked under her breath. "That's no way to treat luck when you've got your hands on it. Now then, let me see what I see."

But before she was well launched we heard the sound of oars and someone whistling from the water.

"That'll be Tim," she told us, and she went to the door and hailed him.

"But Kate needs hers told, don't you, Kate?" Nat came over to me in a burst of remorse. "I guess maybe it was my fault about the boat. If I'd tied it tighter then you wouldn't have got all stung up, so you ought to have the best fortune of us all."

"We haven't got time," Rissa was already gathering up her shoes and basket. "We'll be ever so late anyway, and look at her hands."

She was right about that. They were so swollen I could not have bent a finger, not even for all the luck in the world. But Old Lady Phibben promised that if we would come back some day I should have mine too. So we were put into her son's old dory, our feet among wet clam shells and I wrapped in a red tablecloth because my clothes were still too damp to pull over all my hornet stings.

"Good-bye," we called to Old Lady Phibben as we swung out into the mid-stream.

"Good-bye," she answered from the door, "Don't forget what I told you. Tim, you watch out for them now and come straight back."

She spoke to him like a child, which was indeed all he ever was, poor fellow. I think he tried to talk to us on the way home, but he had a queer, thick speech that was hard to follow. Rissa and Nat tried to make polite answers, but now that we were headed for home, with all the confessions and explanations just around the next bend of the river as you might say, we all grew low-spirited and quiet. Crazy Tim's boat was slimy with fish scales and clams and water that slopped about our feet. Rissa couldn't keep her skirts clear of the mess and Nat wrinkled his nose against the stench that was as strong as the familiar one we knew from the old fish houses by the Little Prospect wharf. Hungry gulls, scenting it as well as we, swooped low over us, on the trail of fish cleanings. Even I, in a miserable heap on the stern seat, caught the strange brightness of their breasts and wings in the long, slanting light of late afternoon, and those watching eyes that were never still. So we came home in the first flush of sunset, a bedraggled and anxious group.

CHAPTER IV

INSTEAD of the Major punishing Nat and Rissa for our day's junketing and the loss of the dory which must have been carried out to sea for no trace could be found of it along the tide-water, he seemed almost gratified by the expedition. It was the sort of healthy, youthful mischief he understood, and I think he felt encouraged by Nat's part in it.

"We'll make a sailor of you yet," he told him that evening after supper. "But you're to learn how to tie a boat fast and to take care of your sister. There's a skiff down at the yards just the size for you to handle, and I'll have one of the men show you how to manage the sail."

They reported this to me from the back hallway on their way to bed. I was already in mine and I had not fared so well in the matter of scolding. Mother had been pretty well put-out when she saw the state of my clothes. She wasn't pleased, either, at our having gone to the ruined mill. Annie Button and George had told her some shady tales about Old Lady Phibben and Crazy Tim and though I tried to explain how kindly they had treated us, she only shook her head and acted as if we had been in bad company. But the hornet stings were so painful that she let the matter drop, thinking, as well she might, that my misery was punishment enough.

"Well, it's a mercy it was you and not Rissa they stung," she comforted me as I lay in my darkened room, smeared with more remedies to take down the swelling. "You put me in mind of those dolls I'd make out of dough and fry in the fat kettle for you,—all swole out in the wrong places."

I could picture myself only too plainly from her words, and

even when I was able to be up and about I kept out of Major Fortune's way for several days. By the time I was presentable again, Fourth of July was over and the three of us putting our foolish heads together over a new plan. I think it had come to Rissa first, though it concerned Nat and the piano in the east parlor. They told me about it down in the boathouse after I had been sworn to keep the secret. They need not have bothered to make me cross my heart and hope to die if I told. I was always far too eager to share their schemes, even such a risky one as this.

"We're going to have a club," Rissa began, "and you can be long if you'll promise to help."

"It's got to be like a secret society," Nat put in, his eyes shining like blackberries as we crouched close in the dimness.

"Well," I said, "what's it about?"

"Me." Nat was almost bursting to tell, but Rissa was better at explaining things.

"You see, Kate," she went on. "Nat's just got to have a chance to play the piano and you know how father is."

"I know," I nodded, "didn't he say if he ever caught him at it again he'd—"

"Yes, he did," Rissa broke in, "but I've thought of a way, and if you'll help us he'll never know."

"But supposing he found out?" I was born cautious and ten years of experience had taught me to be more so. "You know how they always do, Rissa."

"Oh, Kate, don't act so stupid!" She tossed back her hair from her face and drew her straight brows together in a frown. "We can get around him if we're careful. That's why it's going to be a secret society. I've thought of a name for it,—the S.S. double P. Secret Society for piano playing."

"I've just got to," Nat urged me with the look I could never say no to. "I keep making up tunes in my head every night after I go to bed, and what's the good if I can't play them?"

I gave in as they knew I would. Their plan seemed safe enough in spite of the excited chills that ran through me. Now that the days were long and the weather good and the Fortune

ship-yard so busy with work on the "Rainbow", Major Fortune had taken to driving there each day. He left immediately after breakfast and seldom returned before sundown. Once mother and Annie and Rose were through the dishes they sat out sewing in a little grape arbor by the driveway where they could keep an eye out for visitors and also be near the kitchen if baking or preserving were under way. We would be free to amuse ourselves as we pleased, indoors or out. Rissa's music lessons had stopped for the summer, but she was supposed to keep up her practicing. She would pretend to do so then and who would know if she or Nat were at the piano?

"It won't sound like the pieces Miss Ada Joy teaches you." I objected for I was always practical minded.

"Well, they won't know the difference," Rissa was confident. "Annie's getting deaf as a post and Rose can't tell one tune from another. If your mother finds out she won't tell on us even if she does scold."

"The only trouble would be father coming in early or someone driving in without our hearing," Nat told me, "that's why you'll have to keep watch, Kate. You will, won't you?"

"If you sit in the window seat you can see anyone coming over the bridge before they turn into the drive and the trees shut them out. That would give us plenty of time to close the piano and get out of the way. I'd do it only I've got to help Nat, and you don't know how to play."

"Well," I never meant not to join in the plan, but I couldn't help feeling it wouldn't be so much fun for me. "I'll do it if we can have it a real society, like the Masons' Order down in the village, and give each other a secret handshake."

"We can," Rissa was very generous with me that afternoon. I was going to be important to them and they both knew it. "We'll hook our little fingers together, like this, when we shake and that'll be the sign."

"And we can rap, too," Nat suggested eagerly. "Three raps under the table or on the wall,—rap-rap—rap-p-p." He struck his knuckles sharply on the boathouse floor as he spoke. "That'll

mean,—'He's going, almost time!' And if we make it like this,—rap-rap! rap-rap! That'll mean watch out."

We were bewitched with the idea, and practiced rappings till our knuckles were almost raw. Nat's eyes would keep shining and we could hardly hold our faces straight as we sat in the parlor after supper. I remember we slipped out into the garden when the Major had buried himself in his paper, and that we sat close together on a stone bench talking of our plan in excited whispers. It was a warm July night and the fireflies in the shrubbery were thick as stars overhead. Nat caught one and made a cage of his hand about the winking glow.

"If you were a bug, Kate," he asked me, "would you rather be a firefly or a cricket?"

"I wouldn't be a bug for anything," I told him, and Rissa, for once agreed with me.

"But if you had to be?" He insisted.

"A firefly's prettier." I decided, as I looked across the dark water and saw Whale Back Light flashing beyond the Narrows, hardly bigger than the bright speck between his cupped fingers.

"Yes, but a cricket can sing." He said.

"Chirp, you mean." Rissa was scornful. "Bo says they feel the frost in their hind legs the way he does in his knees when it's going to rain. Hundreds and hundreds of them all rubbing their legs together, that's what he says it is when we hear them in the fall."

Our great enterprize began the very next afternoon. It prospered better than we had dared hope. I think Major Fortune must have been more worried that summer than even Henry Willis suspected not to have tracked down our guilty looks and flushed faces each time he set out with Bo in the dog cart. Why he did not inquire about the queer rappings that came from under tables and the back entry door I cannot to this day understand, but the S.S. double P. flourished and its three members grew bolder as each July day passed without mishap. He would have liked to take Nat with him on these drives to the ship-yard, but such long rides turned him faint and giddy and usually

ended by humiliating them both. So he never guessed with what secret satisfaction the three demure faced children watched him take the reins and turn the horses towards the turnpike, or that the dim parlor rang to forbidden music once I could report them safely clattering over the wooden bridge.

"Someday you young ones'll get caught at it." Mother protested a week or so later when she discovered what use we were making of his absences. "If the Major finds Nat over that piano again I wouldn't answer for what he might do."

Still she kept our secret, and if the others knew, they gave no sign. It came to be like a play that we acted each day, and I crouching at the window that overlooked the dip of road by the salt inlet, took my part with all seriousness. I felt the responsibility, for once Nat and Rissa opened the piano they forgot everything but the black and ivory keys and the little notes that climbed in and out of ink fence-rails. It seemed nothing short of miraculous to me, that those two could understand them, the same as I could printed words. I was an active child, and I must confess I grew pretty cramped and tired watching there on the window seat often for three and four hours at a stretch. Sometimes when they were going it together and the room full of beautiful sound I would strain my eyes till they ached to catch that one sight of the horses coming back over the bridge. I couldn't have heard the hoof-beats on the wooden boards above the music and the great spruces hid the rest of the road. Still, it was sweet to have a part in this game which could bring bright color to Nat's usually pale checks as he bent to the rows of keys. I marveled at the sure way his fingers sped over them, and that he could tell if Rissa, playing beside him, struck a single false note or dragged a beat behind. It was mostly a queer jargon to my unmusical ears, but I began to have feelings about some of the pieces. I remember one in particular they talked about.

"You see, Rissa," Nat explained. "It wasn't right the way Miss Ada Joy had you play it. Listen! It's like this." His fingers flew over the keys and his thick hair shook in time as if every lock were alive. He was panting with excitement when he

stopped. "It's a polonaise. That's a dance. I looked it up in the dictionary."

"Well, but my goodness, Nat," she complained, "suppose it is. You needn't get so worked up over it. You're as red as a turkey cock."

"It sounds like a barn dance they played down to Trundy's Tavern once," I told them from my post. "They called it the 'Portland Fancy'."

Nat wanted to know more about it, but I couldn't even hum the tune.

"A man named Chopin wrote this one." He went on. "I like him and I wish Miss Joy had left more of his. It's better a lot than this 'Poet and Peasant' one. Now I'm going to play what I made up last night in bed."

My right foot had gone to sleep but I didn't dare move once he began his own piece. He'd played little snatches of tunes before, but this was different. I couldn't believe he had really done it, and yet I knew Nat could do anything. Listening to it made me feel somehow queer and cold though the sun was coming in hot on my shoulders. There were deep, thunderous parts in it, like the sea or wind in branches, but soft parts, too, that made me feel the way I did when I read about the "Little Sea-Maid" and "The Nightingale." Yes, it was a kind of magic, I told myself. I knew it must be. Rissa knew a little of the magic, and poor faded Miss Ada Joy with her spectacles and black silk basque did too. They could both make the little notes come clear and precise from their fingers. But Nat could make you forget they were notes at all. Even I knew the difference.

"Oh, Nat!" I cried at the last note. "How could you make it up all by yourself? Did you honest?"

I wanted to run to him, but I dared not risk leaving the window seat. He nodded modestly, but his eyes were very bright.

"It's splendid!" Rissa cried. "I like it lots better than that polonaise. Only it's a shame we don't know how to write it all down."

"I've got to learn how to." Nat's face clouded suddenly. "If

there was just some way. But I'm getting so I can keep them in my head. Come on, Rissa, let's try that duet again. We didn't keep together last time."

"All right, Nat, move over on the bench."

I wasn't held to the music as well when Rissa played with him. The long, late July afternoon was very warm and I was growing tired. I leaned my head against the window frame and kept to my watch behind the green damask curtains. The sun slanted through the ranks of nearby spruces, and below me the garden, which was George Button's pride, showed yellow and blue and all shades of rose. I could watch bees going diligently from flower to flower, and tawny butterflies stayed so still sometimes they might have been anchored to the clumps of hollyhock and delphinium spikes. Through the gap, across the waters of the inlet, I could see men mowing in a far field. Their scythes sent out quick flashes in the sun, and they moved, sure and steady, as if like the little figures on the French clock, they too were part of Time's machinery. It made me drowsy to watch them, so far and small in that yellowing meadow. Every so often I would shift my eyes to the green of the spruces that hid the driveway, where chipmunks moved, fleetier than shadows. I could not hear their chattering above the storm of music, but their quick dartings helped me fight off the drooping of my eyelids.

"For I mustn't get sleepy," I told myself, whenever the road and distant meadow blurred before me.

I could never explain, not then or afterwards, how it happened. Suddenly the duet stopped short, the notes chopped off in mid-air as if one of those far scythes had borne down upon them. Behind the curtains at my back was silence, so heavy and yet somehow tingling that I knew even before I heard the Major's voice shatter it, that we were trapped there, all three of us together.

"Nathaniel! Clarissa!"

I was numb with panic as I peered round the curtain folds. I shall never forget how he looked standing there in the door-

way, enormous in his linen duster. He had not stopped to put back the carriage whip. I could see its long lash twisted about his boots.

"So," he spoke in the level, quiet voice that we always dreaded most, "this is what happens when I'm away! How long has this been going on?"

Those two at the piano did not move, though Rissa managed to answer.

"Oh, Father," she began, "we didn't mean any harm——"

"Only disobedience, eh?" He dismissed her plea with a withering glance. "You know what I told you both the last time I caught you at it." Since there was no reply from the piano, he strode into the room, flicking the whip as he came. "Have you got anything to say for yourself?" His eyes were bent upon the boy before him.

"No, Sir," Nat had grown white as the sheets of music on the rack. His words were half a whisper, then his lips shut fast again.

Clarissa tried once more.

"It wasn't Nat's fault, father, I—" She lied with all the cunning she could muster. "It's a duet and I couldn't play it alone, so I thought you wouldn't mind just this once."

"Be quiet, Clarissa." It infuriated him to have her take Nat's part. "We don't need any more from you." He was standing over them now. "Stand up!" He ordered his son sharply, "if you've got gumption enough to!"

I saw Nat get up and stand by the piano with his lower lip sucked under his teeth.

"You know I said you were not to touch that." Major Fortune gave a fierce jerk of his head towards the black and ivory keys. "You can't have forgotten."

"No, Sir, I didn't."

He spoke low, but when I heard him my heart felt like a cold pebble under my dress front. In the stillness I could hear the clock strike four deep notes. I knew how the little woodsmen were sawing away with their cross-saws, but I only saw those two Nathaniel Fortunes facing each other.

"Hold out your hands!"

Clarissa started up with a smothered cry. Her father stopped her with a frown. Nat's hands came out of his pockets, palms out, his fingers like twigs in the dimness.

"No, the other way,—as if you were playing that damned thing!"

Nat turned them over. I saw the whip-lash rise and fall with a smart crack across his knuckles. That brought me to as sharply as if it had been laid upon me. I have no remembrance of leaving the window seat, but there I was beside them. I must have bobbed up before Major Fortune with the suddenness of a Jack-in-the-box.

"You leave him be!" I heard myself panting.

"Well, by Godfrey!" He stared down at me with the same queer look he had had on our first meeting.

"You've got no call to beat him!" I could feel the words spurting out of me. I had forgotten how it annoyed him to see me overtopping his own son. I had forgotten everything but the way Nat's hands looked still spread out and quivering.

"Well," he said, keeping his eyes on me so hard I could see the reflected squares of the window in the dark pupils, "you're a spunky little varmint. I'll say that for you."

He did not raise the lash again. After another moment of staring at us he turned on his heel. Rissa was crying by that time and Nat shook all over though he stood in the same spot.

"Clear out of here, the lot of you!" The Major spoke over his shoulder. "Go upstairs to your room, Nat, and stay there till I tell you to leave it."

I did not wait to speak to Rissa, and I remember nothing more till I found myself climbing the ladder to the hay-loft. Sobs were gathering in my throat and tears blinded me so I could only feel for the rungs as I mounted. It had been my refuge before and it was to be many times again, but never was I so in need of it as on that afternoon. Once I flung myself down in the dusty warmth of dried grass and clover I gave up to a flood of fright and fury and humiliation. I seldom cried

and for this reason I was overwhelmed by the violence of my own tears. Between my gusts of sobbing I heard Rissa call my name guardedly from garden and orchard but I was past answering her. So I burrowed deeper into the hay with no thought for my dress or the sharp spikes that scratched and half choked me. After awhile my weeping grew less wild. My tears were spent and only long spasms of sobs shook me. I lay there, face down, going over and over the whole scene, every look and word and motion of which was terrifyingly clear to me then and will be till the day I die.

My own part in the catastrophe was what I could not reconcile. I wasn't one to make allowances, at least, not for anyone but Nat. I tried to think how I could have missed seeing the carriage come over the bridge. It is still a mystery to me. But I knew that I had somehow managed to fail in my part of the secret game that would never again be played in the east parlor. I had stood up to Major Fortune. That was only right and fair. I knew, though, for certainty that no good would come of it.

"Things'll never be the same again." I said to myself there in the hot, sweet smelling hay-loft with my own despair. "I'll fix it some way to get back at Nat. I know he will."

I turned over on the hay and lay still at last after my wild crying. Through the criss-cross dried spikes I could look up at the enormous rafters where swallows swooped and fingers of light slanted through unseen gaps. The cows were back from pasture. I could hear George and Bo milking below me in the barn. Then they went off and I heard the supper bell ring from the kitchen. But I did not answer its summons. Faint stampings and munchings came from the stalls below, and an occasional squeak as families of field mice settled themselves somewhere in the hay. After awhile I sat up, sneezed, pushed my dusty, rumpled hair out of my eyes, and wiped my face with the hem of my skirt, before I started back to the house.

They were all at supper and it was easy to slip in through the open front door. As I passed the dining room windows I could

see Rissa and the Major alone at the table under the steady canvas stares of two Fortune portraits. I reached my own room in safety and took out from its place a little pearl handled knife which I kept in my top dresser drawer. It was all I could think of to show Nat how sorry I felt for betraying him. He had lost his knife and I knew he would lose this, too, inside of a week. It seemed a pity because then we wouldn't have one between us. Still, I couldn't think of any other gift to make him. I guessed that it would be risky to go to his door, but there was another way of reaching him. One of his windows gave on the ell side, and by climbing out on the roof I could reach it. The window was open and I started across the hot tin that felt like an oven lid under my bare feet.

"Nat," I whispered, clutching the sill and bracing my feet on the boards below.

A chair scraped inside and then he came close.

"You better sit on the edge," he cautioned, "so's you can drop down quick."

I swung myself up to the sill, my legs dangling, and he crouched on the floor, his elbows resting beside me. I could see his eyes were red, and I knew he had been crying. For a moment I didn't know how to begin.

"Your hair's all full of hay," he said, pulling a wisp out and holding it between his fingers. The skin was blistered on one of his knuckles but not badly.

"Did it hurt?" I asked him.

"Not much. It just smarts, kind of."

"Here," I pulled the knife in its little chamois case out of my pocket and laid it on the sill between us. "You can have it."

"For tonight, or for keeps?"

"For keeps." I tried to think of words for what I wanted to say, but I wasn't very good at that sort of talk. "I'm real sorry, Nat," I began at last, "about this afternoon. I didn't see a sign of him, honest I didn't."

"He was pretty mad, wasn't he?" Nat asked.

"Madder'n hops. Nat, you know I wouldn't not have told you if I'd seen him in time?"

"I know." He told me. "But I wish you had."

"So do I. I don't see how I could have missed them on the bridge. I never did before. What's he going to do?"

"He's getting George to put a padlock on the piano, and Rissa's to take lessons at Miss Ada Joy's from now on."

"Then you won't ever get a chance at it again?"

"I guess not." He sighed heavily. "Anyway not till I'm grown up and go away from here."

"It's meaner than mean." I kicked at the clapboards till my toes tingled.

We were silent there together for a long time. The western sky seethed with fiery rose and made the sea bright beyond the dark points of the spruces. Gulls were letting the sunset take them home to the outer islands and the white washed tower of Whale Back Light stood out to sea like a far candle.

"Maybe," I said, "he wouldn't lock it up if we all went and said we were sorry and we wouldn't do it again?"

"But I would," he shook his dark head, "first chance I got."

"I'd give up going to the launching," I promised in sudden recklessness, "if 'twould do any good?"

"It wouldn't." He began to drum on the window sill. It was a way he had, making up tunes that only he knew and understood.

"I guess we have to wait till we grow up to do things we want to." I told him.

"I know." He agreed, "but it's a long way off."

"Well, you're bound to do what you want to someday, Nat. Remember what Old Lady Phibben said when she looked at your hands?" I reminded him. "She said you'd be spreading them out in glory someday."

"It was funny that part about the white horses, wasn't it?" He looked thoughtful. "Father's are all bays and sorrel."

"You watch out same's she said to." I cautioned. Just then a door banged somewhere below us and steps sounded on the brick walk. That meant supper was over and it would be better

for me not to linger. Still, I hated to go, and I hadn't said what I had meant to. It was different talking to Nat like this, just the two of us by ourselves without Rissa to break in. "Nat," I tried again, and the words came out in a sudden burst. It was easier now that I could hardly see his face for the fading light. "I'll make it up to you someway. You see if I don't."

Once I had got them out, I felt unaccountably shy and foolish, so I let myself down to the ell roof and made off without waiting for any answer.

CHAPTER V

How shall I write of those early fall mornings? How shall I tell of the peculiar glaze that came upon every berry and leaf and grass-blade, or how the sea was bright beyond all believing, and crickets beating out their shrill pulses in the burnt brown grass? It was as if some inner hint of frost quickened every living thing to put forth its best of color and fruit and song. We three children felt it stirring in our veins, though we had no means to show it except our overflowing high spirits. That was my first sight of September by this northern coast, and though I have seen so many autumns flare since then, never yet have I been able to believe in the glory my eyes were beholding. Day after day we watched the dark wedges of wild geese fly south and marveled at their sure winging. We heard their honking cry, deep with frosty warning.

"How do they know?" I asked Rissa and Nat, the first time I saw the dark wings and long, shifting triangles pass overhead. "How do they know when it's time and where to go?"

"They must have little compasses inside them," Nat told me. "That's where they have it easier than people."

"Yes," Rissa said, "but they aren't smart enough to tell the decoy ducks from real ones. George has got his out already and he's going to put them down by the creek soon."

"Does he shoot them?" I was horrified, as I had been before about the seals.

"Oh, yes," she nodded, "Father says there's nothing he likes so much as a roast wild duck, but Nat and I won't ever touch a mouthful."

"We couldn't," Nat said making a face.

"Well, I won't either." I agreed. "I think it's dreadful, setting out wooden ones that look like their mates to trap them and shoot them down. I hope they fool George and get away."

But for all our wishes George shot plenty that fall. I can remember the sight of the first one he brought in as it lay on the kitchen table. I did not want to look at it, but horror and curiosity drew me there in spite of myself. It was so different from the taut, living birds I had seen taking the blue only a little while before. This one lay heavy and limp, a heap of feathers that showed shifting colors as I blew on the soft breast and head. The wings were lax and long, and the feet strong and webbed, yet delicate in all their creasings. Blood had dripped and dried on the proud beak, and the open eyes, though they were glazed in death, still kept a kind of wild surprise. I couldn't help thinking of the little compass that Nat had said it carried to steer by, and as I did so I turned and ran crying from the kitchen. Mother was put-out later when I wouldn't help her pluck it.

"Now don't you go and get notions," she scolded. "It's all very well for Nat and Rissa to get finicky, but you can't. Where would I be if I took on so over every dead bird I had to cook?"

But she couldn't make me touch a feather.

I think she was glad that the fall term of school would begin for me in a couple of weeks. She liked me to pick up nice ways of talking and such from Nat and Rissa, but she didn't want me to catch other tricks from those two.

It was over a month since the Major had discovered our secret, and we were only just beginning to breathe easily again after that encounter in the east parlor. The piano had been locked ever since and Major Fortune had often looked long and disapprovingly at Nat. Still, there had been no further words about it, and we began to think we had come off easily once his temper had passed. He was away from the house much of those early fall days for he was busy with plans for the launching. Sometimes he did not come home at all but stayed the night with Henry Willis to be near the ship-yard. His mind

and heart were bent upon his new vessel and indeed the whole countryside thought and talked of little else. It was several years since there had been an important launching thereabouts, and all Little Prospect was agog. The Fortune saw mill was humming, and nearly all the able men not already employed there or in the ship-yard were busy with extra work on the "Rainbow." Even the minister had made mention of the great event from his pulpit the Sunday before, as if God Himself must hold it in special regard.

Rissa and Nat and I had exchanged discreet nudges in the Fortune front pew when the Reverend Chase had fervently petitioned Heaven for a northwest wind, and later when he chose for his sermon text:—"She sent out her boughs unto the sea, and her branches unto the river," we had smiled with stealthy satisfaction. We could not help knowing that this concerned us more intimately than the rest of the congregation. Rissa was to christen the "Rainbow" with the cob-webby bottle her father had fetched from the highest shelf in the wine cellar, and Nat and she were going to be at Major Fortune's side along with their cousins from Philadelphia. I would be going, too, and we would all have new outfits. For a week past Miss Addie Jenkins had been up at The Folly every day cutting and fitting yards of India muslin and pale blue taffeta to Rissa, who vowed she lay awake nights thinking of the care she must take wearing it. Her Aunt in Philadelphia had been commissioned to send a new hat and it was a wonderful affair with ostrich feathers and intricately knotted blue ribbons. Ever since its arrival she and I had gone to gaze upon it in its bandbox at least three times a day. Mother had entered into the spirit of the occasion so far as to let Miss Addie make over a cherished plaid mohair for me. She worked on it at odd moments under the dressmaker's directions, and there were a good many head shakings over the size of the waist band and the difficulty of giving it proper style once my sturdy body was inside.

"I'm like to die fitting you, Kate," Miss Addie would sigh through her bristling mouthful of pins. "You put me in mind

of that old dory my brother Dan rigged up once in a made-over sail. Well, it's lucky you won't be in Rissa's shoes at the launching."

With the Major so much away and everyone so busy we three had more freedom than ever, and we made the most of it, though Nat would sometimes go and stand sadly in front of the locked piano. But for the most part we entered into the bustle of preparations. The house had to be thoroughly overhauled against the arrival of the Philadelphia cousins, whose coming Nat and Rissa dreaded as much as I. Their Aunt Esther was Major Fortune's only sister and her two daughters were several years older and far more stylish and grown up according to their memories of the last visit. It was a relief when we heard they would drive directly to the ship-yard from the train and not go with us in the carriage.

Even the tide seemed to have entered into the spirit of the affair, for it would be nine o'clock in the evening before the water would be high enough to float the "Rainbow". A night launching was considered an even greater event than one taking place in broad daylight.

"Not much chance of a fog with the September moon coming on to the full," we heard George Button tell mother. "Yes, sir, everything looks prosperous."

We pestered him with questions and he explained how you couldn't be too careful where moon and tides were concerned. He gave long, rambling accounts of other launchings where owners had taken foolish chances and let their vessels leave the ways with a moon on the wane. That was flying in the face of Providence, according to George, for anyone who knew anything at all knew hard luck and dwindling profits were certain to follow. "No," he told us, "'tisn't safe to trifle with the elements. Sooner or later they pay you back for it."

George had been to sea in his young days and the talk of the launching set him singing sea songs in such lusty tones that his wife scolded and she and mother and Rose complained they were nearly distracted hearing him. But we could never get

enough of them, and often joined him in our favorite,—“Root, Hog, or Die.”

Once, I remember, we were singing it full blast, all four of us, as George weeded the driveway, when the Major and Henry Willis drove in. We had got as far as the verse:—

*“Now we’ve got her fore and aft, and we’ll go below,
The wind is to the eastward and like the devil it does blow,
We beat about and banged about and never saw the sky,
At last we shot in Port Latoun,—Root, Hog, or die!”*

But instead of scolding us for singing a verse with “devil” in it, the Major and Henry Willis smiled broadly. They got out of the carriage and walked up the drive together and we followed, near enough to hear what they were saying about us.

“Sounds as if Nat was getting the salt water spirit,” Henry Willis chuckled.

“He’s going to know more’n to sing about taking reef and getting her fore and aft before I’m through with him!” was the Major’s only comment. Then he squinted at the red ball of sun, slipping behind the islands and gave a satisfied smile. “Well, Henry,” he added, “looks as if we could count on favoring weather.”

It turned suddenly cold the evening before the great day, and so I had my first glimpse of northern lights on the eve of the launching. It may be partly because of this that they must always seem the strangest and most stirring of all natural wonders to me. We should have missed them but for George who called us out of the parlor to behold the spectacle. Nat and Rissa and I pressed close together at the window in the upper hall, awed into silence by the northern sky. Over the far crest of Jubilee Mountain the heavens were bristling with long fingers of ghostly white. They dimmed and brightened and swept down almost to the edge of the shore and the Narrows. Sometimes ice-green wheels moved through them and flashes of red appeared and disappeared eerily. And there was not a

sound. They flared in a stillness that brought queer chills to my ten year old bones.

"What do they mean?" I asked, shaken by the sight.

"Cold weather coming," said Rissa, "and a bad winter. At least that's what they said the other time we saw them."

"But not a bad sign for the launching?" I pressed her.

"I don't think so, and you mustn't say things like that, Kate, —come on, let's all go right to bed now, and make it tomorrow sooner."

By morning we had forgotten them in the bustle of preparations. Hours slipped by in a frenzy of helping pack baskets of food; of running errands to garden and orchard and barn; of scrubbing and brushing and combing, and the last putting on of finery. Nat had a velvet jacket the color of russet leaves, and his eyes were all dark pupil under his hair that would never stay slicked and smooth. My round head was painfully neat and moist to keep down my cowlicks and my cheeks were scarlet from soap and water. I hardly recognized myself in the made-over plaid, and I had brand new button boots with tassels and a squeak that Nat insisted sounded louder than old Deacon Black passing the plate in church. But when Rissa appeared she drove all other thoughts from my mind.

"She's a picture and no mistake," I heard mother and Rose whisper as she came down the stairs to join us.

"The Major'll be prouder'n Lucifer when he claps eyes on her." Rose agreed. "I hope to goodness she don't spill anything down her front."

"Trust her not to," mother sighed as she smoothed her own best black dress. "Young's she is she always looks as if she'd come out of the bureau drawer. I wish Kate had the knack of it, she's commenced to lose her starch already."

"Rissa," Nat told her as we waited for George to bring the horses round, "there won't be anyone at the launching can hold a candle to you, will there, Kate?"

"No," I said loyally, my eyes glued to her trim grace under

the draped blue and white, "she'd ought to be on the cover c a soap box."

It was no small compliment that I gave her, for then w children had few colored pictures save those. I could tell sh was pleased by the faint deepening of pink in her cheeks, bu she kept her lips pressed tight in a way she had when she fel a lot depended upon her.

"You'd throw the bottle lots better, Kate," she said gener ously, "I'm so scared I won't break it. Father'd never get ove it if I didn't."

Just then Bo and George drove up. We three children wer swung into the front seat, while mother and the rest sat in the back with all the baskets.

"Well," George Button called out in his best sea-voice, "al aboard there, and all sail set!"

Roadsides were bright with asters and goldenrod all the way and mountain ash trees loaded with fiery fruit. Bo picked a branch as we passed and Nat had a bunch for his button-hole and I one to wear in my brown straw hat. Once we got on the turnpike all sorts of rigs were headed in the same direction,—old buggies and farm-wagons and prosperous carriages from Little Prospect and neighboring harbors. It might have been election or County Fair day from the cluttered roads and deserted houses, and from the white triangles of sail all headed for Fortune's Ship Yard.

It seemed as if everyone would be there before us and we three worked ourselves into a fever of impatience before the five mile ride was ended. But at last we were there and the place as gay with bunting as the fall trees had been along our way. I had thought to keep with Nat and Rissa but once we were set down from the carriage Henry Willis bore the two away to join their Philadelphia cousins and I was left with mother and the Jordan family. Jake Bullard was there in his best Sunday suit and though he had scowled at sight of my two companions, he joined me after awhile and we prowled about together. He and

some of his cronies had been there for hours and it pleased him to show off the sights and answer my foolish questions.

"I'll show you the best place to see from," he volunteered, "We got plenty of time before we eat supper."

I followed him up a ladder into an old sail loft where the view was uninterrupted by tall bodies, or hurrying workmen. I had only been in the brick office once, so I had had no notion what a bustling ship-yard could be on the eve of a launching. No vessel in harbor had ever looked so vast as this one,—set high and dry, with stern to sea and great wooden timbers holding it like giants' arms.

"That's the cradle she sets in," Jake told me. "It has to cant just that much and no more. If 'twas half an inch out there'd be trouble when they started the blocking."

I didn't understand till after it was over what he had been talking about, but I listened as if I did. All the time he pointed this or that out to me I was thinking how the figures of the men working on the hull below us looked no bigger than dark bees clustering on an enormous hive. The hammers and men's voices mingled into a sort of gigantic buzzing.

Even without her masts, which Jake explained would not be set up till she lay at the wharf, the "Rainbow" loomed like a monster. High and dry she rose above the water that was steadily rising to receive her. A rich smell I had never known before hung low over the whole yard. There has been none like it since, for it was made up of lesser smells,—the steam of hot iron from the blacksmith's forge; boiling tar; hemp rope; freshly sawed lumber, and the tallow greasing the ways under that untried keel. My nose quivers yet at remembrance of it.

"There's Cousin Sam," I pointed out. "I didn't know he'd be working on it."

"Why, he's a master hand at the blocking," Jake told me scornfully. "I guess there couldn't be a launching without him. He'll knock the last block out, most likely."

"Is that hard to do?" I ventured, there being no one else about to hear my ignorance.

"Holy Moses, yes! You just wait and see. He'll have to be quick as lightning. Sometimes there ain't even time for him to get out 'fore she starts. He'll deal that last block a regular knock and then maybe he'll have to throw himself down quick and let it go right over him down the ways."

"Oh, my, Jake, won't he be all squashed?"

"No, Sir, he won't. He says there's plenty of room if he lays flat. It's loose timbers and blocks flying round he has to watch out for. I wish they'd let me do it."

I couldn't help staring at Jake with new admiration, for he looked as if he really could do it with those big-knuckled fists of his. My expression must have pleased him for when we went down the ladder again he did not leave me to join the Little Prospect boys. We found mother and the Jordan tribe and though I missed Nat and Rissa, still I was glad of Jake and his wide grin and pushing elbows in all the crowd.

We ate our supper, picnic fashion on a point not far from the yards. Besides Jake there were other schoolmates about me,—Abbie Stanley and her brother Joe; Dan Gilley and Mollie and his older sister Sadie, as well as Cousin Martha Jordan's Ruth and Hilda. I felt shy at first after being with Nat and Rissa all summer long. But little by little it got to seem like recess in the school yard again, and we ate apples and crullers, and eggs and pie as lively as could be. Only I couldn't forget those other two, not even when we skipped stones and played tag on the strip of shingle, getting as near the tide line as we dared without wetting our best shoes. I was careful not to talk with them the way I did with Nat and Rissa, for I knew they wouldn't like it, and would say I was getting stuck up and full of corn-starch airs. I'd heard them talk among themselves about the Fortune pair before now. As it was, Abbie and Ruth and even tall Sadie got discussing Rissa's clothes till I was ready to fly out at them.

"Did you see her?" Sadie laughed to the others. "Why she looks all rigged up like a Maypole. Mother says it's a shame and she's only going on thirteen!"

"And him in a jacket like the one the monkey wore in the circus!" Jake jeered.

"A regular Miss Nancy that's what he is!" Joe Stanley was scornful.

It would have ended in a squabble most likely and I wouldn't have been able to hold my own against so many dissenting voices, only just then the others called us to help carry the baskets back to the wagons. Already the sun had set and the red afterglow was dwindling behind the spruces on the western point. A fall chill was in the September air and I felt glad of mother's old paisley shawl though it was so long I had to hold up its fringes with both my hands. We found good places near enough to see the busy men on the dark hull. The noise of hammering and shouting had grown louder. The very air was charged with a kind of current from all the human beings gathered together in that place. But at the time I could not guess that. I only knew that under my layers of shawl and dress my heart began to beat in time to the hammers. Flaring torches had been lit and in the yellow flickering light the ship-yard looked vast and strange. All the familiar faces about me wore an unnaturally sharp, bright look. The tide was well up now and still rising. I could not see how far the timbers Jake had called the cradle stretched into the dimness, but I know that nothing again will ever seem so tremendous to me as the "Rainbow" before she took to water. There still lacked some minutes before the September moon would be up.

"Kate," I suddenly heard Nat's voice at my side and felt his hand. "I thought I'd never find you in all these people. Come on with me."

"But, Nat," I began, "there isn't room, is there?"

"Hurry," he urged me, "Father won't notice, and he won't care anyhow, he's too busy. You can squeeze in by me on the platform."

Mother nodded and we began picking our way back between all the close pressed legs and skirts. It wasn't till we were safely up on the rough piece of scaffolding above all the heads and al-

most overhanging the great bows, that I knew how disappointed I had been not to see it all with those two. I could not get close to Rissa, but we smiled at each other, and I knew they were both glad I was there. She wore a long red cloth cape over her finery. It made her look taller and more grown up than she had in the afternoon. She stood beside her father and her Aunt and the two Philadelphia cousins, the bottle with all its ribbons pressed close to her chest and her lovely face a little pale and anxious.

"Rissa's a whole lot prettier'n your cousins," I whispered to Nat.

"Yes," he nodded, "and I think her clothes are nicer too, but she doesn't now she's seen theirs have got fur trimming."

"Moon's up—over there!" Someone cried above the poundings as an orange rim began to show above the wooded ridge of Ragged Island.

"There's a sight for you, Esther," I heard Major Fortune say to his sister with a wave of his arm, as if he had somehow contrived to make it rise.

Up and up it crept till the shining ball had cleared the black trees. The red drained out as it climbed, and at last it hung, round and golden, above its own broad silver track. The farther islands swam in that brightness like bristling-backed monsters, and though I was already used to moonlight over sea and islands, yet somehow this was different from all other moons. I turned to Nat who stood quiet beside me.

"Nat," I said because I felt somehow frightened by it. But before I could speak or he could answer me, the hammer blows were beginning to fall with curious heavy thuds on the wooden blocks. "It's begun," I cried to him above the sudden commotion. He nodded and from that moment his eyes got big and dark and far removed from me.

There will never be any sound like that for me till the day I die. The air was alive with a great throbbing pulse of hammer beats, hundreds of them all going it together. At last those quickening blows and my own heart beats became one in some

strange and indescribable way. I lost all count of time and nothing was real to me but that sound and the dark shapes of men's bodies and arms rising and falling in the smoky glare below me. They made me think of the little men going through their motions on the clock in the east parlor. I tried to tell Nat, but he hardly seemed to hear me. His cheeks had grown red, the way they never were except when he played the piano and he kept time to the hammers, beating with his clenched fist on the wooden railing as if he were part of it all.

The blocks of wood were falling away under the blows so fast it made me giddy to watch. And then there was a pause, and a whisper went round that it was time for the christening.

"Friends," Major Fortune's voice went out to the farthest corners as he stepped to the edge of the make-shift platform and leaned out over the "Rainbow's" forepart, "there's no call for me to make a speech. I'm not much given to words as most of you know. Timber and canvas and cargoes are my line and I'll back my last dollar on them every time. I don't need to tell you that my father and my father's father sent Fortune ships round the globe and that the best went into their making then and now." Someone broke in there with a cheer and other voices took it up in a mighty cheer that silenced the Major for more than a minute. I could see his eyes were pleased under their beetling brows, though there was a sort of heaviness in his voice as he went on. "Times may not be what they were and shipping may not be so prosperous as it once was, but I'm not one to break with the past for any new notion afloat. Fortunes have always built the finest wooden ships that sailed, and this vessel here on the ways is sound in every beam, that's all I've got to say."

He stepped back to more cheers as the Reverend Chase took his place to pronounce a blessing. Peering under my hat brim as he prayed I stole a look at Rissa. She had slipped out of the red cape and I could see her hands shaking about the bottle.

"Oh, Lord," I prayed in a more personal petition than the Reverend Chase, "please let it break good and hard when she throws it."

Only those of us who stood close could hear Rissa say:—"I christen thee 'Rainbow' ", but a rewarding splinter of glass followed, and a sharp fragrance rose from the bows. A moment later the poundings began with renewed vigor. Now they were coming faster and faster, with a kind of ringing wildness that was like a storm of sound. Then the last blows fell. Braces cracked and solid blocks spurted as if they were no more than chips flying before an axe. Suddenly there was a rending and splintering the like I have never heard before or since, and the whole great mass began to move, as if it were breaking up there in front of my eyes. Those sweat-glazed men leaped aside as the great hull settled down into her cradle. It slid with her while she moved steadily on and out over the greased ways. Above the noise of ripping wood and rushing water, a cry went up:—

"She's floated! Hip-hip-hooray, Rainbow!"

Nat's cold fingers were gripping mine. My heart seemed to swell inside me, and my whole body to be swallowed up in its beating. I knew that I was shouting along with the rest, and the usually demure Rissa was hopping up and down and waving her handkerchief. Only the Major stood quiet, with head craned forward, to watch the welcoming surge of water.

"Took it neat as a dolphin," he cried out to Henry Willis, relieved and jubilant.

In the confusion that followed I have no very clear notion of what happened next. But I began to know that something was the matter. I heard cousin Sam Jordan's name on people's lips.

"He's hurt,—bad," someone was saying.

"Block must have caught him."

And from far off the call.

"Anybody seen Doc Robinson?"

I tried to beat my way through all the crowd to find mother, for I had already lost Nat and Rissa. Instead I kept being pushed down nearer to the mass of timber and wrecked wooden supports. Odd shaped wedges tripped me up and I would have fallen save for the close pressed bodies of men and women. A

jumble of talk was going on above me, and I made out a little of what they were saying.

"No, he ain't stirred yet."

"Must have hurt him inside."

"Anybody fetching the brandy?"

"Here's Doc now,—let him through."

A woman was crying beside me, an old woman I had seen in the village. Tears were running down her wrinkles, and she kept saying over and over how it was a bad sign. There hadn't been an accident at a launching in twenty years, not since the "Eliza Jane" left the ways and everyone knew what had happened to her off the coast of Guinea.

It was Bo who found me at last and I was glad to cling to his black hand and let him take me to the carriage. Rissa and the Cousins from Philadelphia had already started back, but Nat and I were hoisted beside Bo on the front seat. All the way home in the bright moonlight they talked of the accident. Cousin Sam Jordan was badly hurt, crushed by falling timbers as he knocked away the last blocks. No one knew whether he would come to or not. His mishap had somehow made the glory of the launching fade to second place. Mother and Annie and Rose could talk of nothing else the whole way. Even black Bo joined in as he slapped the reins on the horses' backs.

"There was blood on that moon. Yes sir, I knows the sign."

"Oh, Bo, there wasn't, was there?" Nat and I shivered to hear him.

"Now don't you go and get the children all on edge, Bo," Mother told him. "I expect signs ain't all they used to be along with other things. You two stop bothering your heads about it and watch out you don't fall over the dashboard."

"Well, it was a nice launching anyhow," I whispered to Nat as we lolled against one another, "and we saw every bit of it."

But he was beating time on my knee. I could feel his cold fingers through my skirt.

"They went like that," I heard him saying softly to himself. "First sort of slow and then faster and faster—"

His voice trailed off but his hands kept on thumping for a long time as the carriage swayed and jolted on its way with the moon high in mid-heaven, laying strange brightness on the Narrows and outer islands and on the broad backs of Fancy and Fanny as they took us home.

CHAPTER VI

FOR me, the launching must always stand for the beginning and the end of many things. For one, the long summer of close companionship with Nat and Rissa was over, and I must set out alone each morning early with my lunch and schoolbooks. Somehow I couldn't feel as easy with the boys and girls from Little Prospect as I had, not after taking on so many of the Fortune ways. I was always having to remember not to say this or that before Jake and the rest, or if I forgot, as I sometimes did, I must face their ready jeers. Looking back on it now through all these years, I wonder I managed as well as I did, not being gifted at play-acting.

Feeling ran high against Major Fortune in Little Prospect after the launching. I caught echoes of this from my schoolmates. It was partly because of the accident, for though Cousin Sam Jordan didn't die as a result of it, he had suffered serious injury. In all fairness it must be said of the Major that he did all anyone could be expected to do for him. He had a doctor come from Boston to examine him, and I know that all through that winter and the next he continued to pay him wages. Still, Cousin Martha complained that Fortune's didn't care how many good men were sacrificed so long as one of their vessels got launched with plenty of hurrahs. Her complaints had more weight with the rest of Little Prospect because a captain from Boston had been chosen to take the "Rainbow" on her first voyage. There were at least three men in the neighborhood who were qualified for such command and who had expected to get it. It rankled the whole community that this had been given to an outsider.

"Little Prospect men knew enough to take Fortune ships out in his father's and grandfather's day," they complained in the village. "You didn't catch them sending off for any Boston or New Bedford skippers."

"And if Abe Morse is good enough for first mate, he's good enough to take command. Nathaniel Fortune needn't set himself up so."

"It don't look too good, Sam Jordan getting struck. Say what you want to, it's a bad sign for a first voyage and he'd better watch out."

So, though the work of fitting out the "Rainbow" was pushed forward, the old zest and spirit had gone out of the undertaking. I heard more than mother and George and Annie guessed. Young as I was, I put two and two together, and knew that the Fortune family had fallen out of favor. But this only made me the more stubborn in my devotion.

If the Major heard echoes of dissatisfaction he never let on by so much as a look. He picked his crew from up and down the coast according to his own judgment, and when the cargo of Maine spruce and pine planks was cut and ready at the Fortune sawmill, he had the "Rainbow" towed into Little Prospect where he might see to her final fitting and loading. Henry Willis and he and the Captain from Boston were in and out of the house all the time those days.

"He's horrid," Nat told me of the newcomer. "He bellows like Sawyer's bull, and he's always slapping me on the back and saying 'Hey, there, my hearty!'"

"Yes," Rissa was in full agreement, "and he calls me 'Sissy'. His hands are too big and all covered with red hairs."

We children were united in our dislike of Captain Mac Murty. He was a huge, red haired man in the fifties, with a voice so used to quarter deck commands, that he could be heard all over Fortune's Folly when he came in for his meals and long conferences in the Major's study. We shrank from all encounters with him, though he tried to make jovial remarks to us and even presented Rissa with a piece of carved ivory he had carried for

years in his pocket. Nat particularly resented him, and shrank away when he was near.

"I wish he'd hurry up and take the 'Rainbow' out of these parts." He told me after one of the Captain's efforts at friendliness. "I hate him."

But it was mid-October before the sailing day was set. The line storm had come late that year, and when it was past a kind of brief and beautiful second summer lingered along the coast. Birches and maples stayed yellow, and swamp and rock-maples were bright flares by any bit of water. In The Folly garden we gathered fierce last blooms of dahlias, zinnias and asters. Everywhere the smell of ripe apples mingled with sea-salt. We three played in the cornfield among the bunched stalks that looked like an Indian village with pumpkins between every wigwam. Only the crickets, shrilling more frantically from brown grass, were not deceived by this false trickery of warmth and royal color.

On one October Saturday the Major took us aboard the "Rainbow". It was the first time I had ever set foot upon a vessel and the height of her masts, so tremendous as we stood below and stared up at the yard arms through all the maze of rigging, was a wonder to me. So was the galley with its stove and pots and crockery, and the quarters for Captain and Mate, with those high bunks above the built-in drawers. Nat could not look long at the masts. It turned him dizzy to think of men climbing so high to reef sail in a strong blow. So we stayed longest hanging over the stern, watching the men who sat on swinging seats painting lines of color just above the letters of her name. The Major had taken a fancy to have a rainbow done there in a bright arch.

"It's a beauty," Nat said, "just like the one we saw over the Narrows last summer, do you remember?"

"Yes," I told him, "and it'll last lots longer in paint."

Even the Major had to laugh at that as he came by to take us back.

We were so happy together that afternoon. As I look back

on it, there was a kind of frantic delight about our walk home through the woods from the old landing by the bridge, and when we stopped for another game of hide-and-seek among the corn stalks. We were like the fall crickets in our shrillness, and I hope they guessed as little as we did how shortly frost and other changes would come upon us. Nat was the liveliest of us three. It seems strange to think of that now.

The "Rainbow" was all set to sail on the following Wednesday morning. There was more bustle than ever in the village and Major Fortune on board most of the time. On Tuesday I went off to school as usual, and those two walked part way with me in the crisp morning freshness. Lessons had not yet begun for them and I felt low spirited as they turned back and I ran on to a long day at my desk. It was longer than ever as it turned out, for I made so many mistakes in fractions that the teacher kept me after school. Before I reached the last mile it was nearly five and a chill wind blowing up from sea. Fog had swallowed the sunset and the islands were faint beyond the Narrows. By looking over my shoulder I could make out the shape of the "Rainbow" riding at anchor near the harbor; her bows dark and pointing; her rigging thin as threads of spider web. But I gave little thought to it as I hurried on. Just where the road dipped into a wooded patch, I heard a cry and a figure rose from between the tree trunks to meet me.

"Rissa!" I cried, startled, for she had never come alone to meet me so far. Even before I reached her I could see she was all upset. Her red cape blew out half fastened and her hair streamed wildly on her shoulders. "You're crying," I said, "what's the matter?"

I knew it was Nat, even before she told me.

"Oh, Kate," she began to sob, her eyes running over and her clear, pale face all mottled with tears, "I've been waiting and waiting, I thought you'd never come. Something terrible's happened—"

She shook so she couldn't go on for a minute and we stood close together there, among dusty goldenrod and asters.

"Is it about Nat?"

She gulped and nodded.

"This morning," she managed to tell me between sobs, "after we came back. Father,—he was talking to Captain Mac Murty, and then,—he—he called Nat in to the study. I listened, and it was awful—"

"Did he take the whip to him again?"

"Lots worse than that. He's going to send him away,—on the 'Rainbow' tomorrow."

I guess I must have looked more scared than she thought I would for she began to cry harder than before. I felt suddenly dull and queer inside my chest, the way I always did when the teacher called on me for things I didn't know how to answer. Then it spread all over me till I grew sick feeling and empty.

"He said he'd been planning it a long time, ever since he caught us at the piano," she went on. "He said it was the only way to make a man of him. Nat cried and I ran right in and cried, too, but it didn't do any good, not a bit."

"And it's tomorrow," I kept saying that over to myself.

It was growing dim at the edge of the woods as we stood there together. Rissa, with all her pride and corn-starch airs gone, was clinging to me with cold fingers. Our tears mingled in the dust at our feet. There was nothing I could do and she knew it, but we were very close in our despair.

"There's Henry Willis," I said, "maybe he could do something."

"He tried. He was up for dinner and he tried to talk father out of it. Nat and I listened, but it wasn't any use."

"Did Nat promise he'd never play anything again?"

"He promised everything he could think of, and I did too. Nothing's any use with father when he's made his mind up. You know it isn't, Kate."

"I know. Where's Nat now?"

"They took him down to the yard with them. They went hours ago and I got so I couldn't stay alone up there anymore waiting for you."

We hurried back through the fall twilight, talking in broken snatches, even making wild, impossible schemes for hiding Nat; for outwitting the Major before sailing time next day. But all the time we knew there would be no chance to carry them out. Nat was as lost to us as if the "Rainbow" was already past Old Horse Ledges and the outer islands. Neither of us could eat a mouthful of supper or heed anything mother and Annie said to us.

The dog-cart was not back yet and we took refuge, as we had often done before, in an old closet under the stairs. It was a favorite hiding spot, and smelled of leather and woolen garments, hanging from their pegs. It was somehow comforting to feel the familiar folds of capes and coats so close about us. Perhaps, we told each other as we listened for the thud of hoofs on the drive, there might be some way out. We even prayed, separately and together, but as Rissa pointed out, she had been praying ever since morning without any effect. The clock in the east parlor struck seven and eight and then half past, before we heard wheels. Our tears and long stay in the dark closet made us blink as we came out into the hall. It took a minute to see things right.

"Nat!" Rissa ran to him with a quick cry that ended in a fresh burst of tears.

But I couldn't move or speak. I just stood there staring to see the change one afternoon had made in him. He wasn't the same Nat who had walked down the road with me that morning. There he stood, fitted out in long, dark trousers much too big for him. A rough pea-jacket was buttoned up to his chin, and a round cap was clutched in one hand. His waving mane of dark hair was gone, clipped sailor-fashion so close to his head he looked like a skinned rabbit. His eyes had the scared, half-glazed look of a rabbit, too, as he shrank, shorn and spindling, between his father and Captain Mac Murty.

"Well, no wonder you're surprised!" the Captain let out a tremendous laugh, seeing our two faces. "Wouldn't know him for the same boy, would you?"

I could see Nat's chin begin to shake and his teeth catch his underlip in the way I knew so well. But I couldn't move from my place by the closet door or fling myself sobbing upon him as Rissa was doing.

"Come, Rissa, none of that!" The Major spoke to her with unaccustomed sharpness.

Nat stiffened and drew away from her, frowning in a last fierce effort not to cry. His eyes reached out to me across the hall. He must have seen the horrified pity in mine, for suddenly he flung his arm across his face and stumbled past us up the stairs.

I had no chance to see, much less to speak to him next morning. Rissa walked with me as far as the gate, but neither of us said a word till we reached the road.

"Father says he doesn't trust me to go down and see them off," she said at last.

"I guess it don't matter now," I told her, shifting my lunch and books.

"No," she agreed, and then her eyes darkened harshly as I had never seen them do before. "If we were older we could do something," she went on, her hands pressed tight together. "Father needn't think I'll ever forgive him for being so mean to Nat, for I won't."

I was almost frightened by her look and voice. Neither of us could cry anymore, all our tears were spent. So at last I turned away.

"Do you want me to tell Nat good-bye for you?" She asked me.

"Yes," I said, "you tell him."

I went on by myself, but when I reached the other side of the wooden bridge, something made me look back. A flash of something white showed at the upper hall window. It moved in the strong October sunshine. I reached in my pocket for my own handkerchief and waved back till my arm ached clear to the socket. Then I had to run every step of the way to the school-house. All that morning I sat with a book propped open on my

desk, but my eyes stared straight ahead of me. I saw and heard nothing, and for once the teacher spared me any questions.

"Come on down to the point and see the 'Rainbow' clear the Narrows," Jake urged me as soon as we streamed into the yard for recess.

But I shook my head and waited till they were all gone off in that direction. My head ached dullly and my feet felt like clods as I went off by myself to an old pasture higher up. It was thick with juniper, and blueberry leaves were blood-red underfoot. I remember that I stooped and picked a sprig of wintergreen to chew as I went. It seemed queer that I could still taste it, yet I could. I was even hungry for the lunch in my pail, and when the bread and butter and cookies and apple were gone, I climbed higher still and sat down on a great gray outcrop of boulder, warm in the noon sun. It had burned off the fog of early morning and the sea was blue beyond the wooded points of headland. And then I saw the long, lovely shape of the "Rainbow" going out to sea, with all her new sails spread in the sun. Yesterday it had seemed to fill the nearer waters; now it looked small as its own model the Major kept on his desk. Gulls followed like a whirling fall of snow-flakes at the stern. I can see it yet as clearly as if it had been scratched with a pen point on the surface of my eleven year old mind.

I had no tears or feelings left as I watched it head out between the islands. But I knew in the sudden, sure way that children do, that nothing would ever be the same again for the three of us.

CHAPTER VII

THERE is little to tell of that late fall and winter. Fortune's Folly was strangely quiet and when Rissa and I talked we found ourselves speaking in whispers as if someone had lately died. The piano was unlocked now but Rissa could not bring herself to touch it often. She shunned the east parlor, preferring the kitchen when I was about, or sitting alone in her bedroom hunched over some book. Her father did his best to please and distract her, but she was not one to be easily diverted. So, though she answered his questions dutifully and thanked him for the gifts he brought her, a chill of distrust had come between them.

"It ain't right for a child to hang on to a grudge so," mother would say when Rose brought out a half touched plate to show her. "I know she was dreadful cut up over the Major sending the boy away, and I can't say's I blame her. Nat's too small and pindling for such a long voyage. They should have broke him in easy on short ones. But Rissa's got a granite streak in her and it's commencing to crop out."

It was no use the Major telling her that Nat would not be over worked. He explained that he had given Captain Mac Murty orders to put no heavy duties on him. Odd jobs, helping in the galley and carrying the mess out, wouldn't hurt, only toughen him. Even Henry Willis was called upon to reassure her.

"I know you miss Nat," he told her kindly one night after supper. "But he's most likely enjoying himself aboard ship by now. Lots of fun for a boy on a long sea voyage and once they make foreign ports he'll have the time of his young life."

"Not Nat," Rissa answered, and shut her lips tight. "He's not like most boys."

"That's just why your father sent him," Henry Willis reminded her. "Some boys have gone younger than eleven."

"He'd hate it if he was a hundred and eleven!" Her eyes turned steely gray like the Major's.

They gave up arguing with her at last. Only when we two were alone would she talk freely, and then it was always of Nat. I missed him in my own way which was not her set, unrelenting sort. Mine would be sudden storms of remorse for my own part in the affair. For I still went back to the day at the piano and my failure to give warning in time. The Major had said he had made up his mind then and there to ship Nat off, and I couldn't ever get that quite out of mind. Sometimes I had to burst out with my feelings.

"You know, Rissa," I would remind her as we sat together in her bedroom through those chill early winter twilights, "it was my place to watch for the carriage. I don't see how I ever came to miss it that time, but still I did and so I'm most to blame."

"I guess he'd have sent him anyway." Rissa tried to be kind. "I wouldn't mind so much if it wasn't for that Captain Mac Murty. But you know he's so big and he loves to tease. He'll go out of his way to plague Nat."

Sometimes we pored over an old Atlas together, wondering if the "Rainbow" could have got to the Equator by then. We measured with our knuckles the way to Singapore which we knew was the port for the lumber. It depressed us to find how small a part of the universe the State of Maine occupied. We took to reading books together. Rissa was given to poetry about that time and one evening she fetched me upstairs to show me a passage she had found earlier in the day. I don't remember what poem it came in, but there was mention of "white horses" in it, and from the rest of the verse we could tell that meant white capped waves. Neither of us had ever heard them called that before and we stared at one another dumbfounded.

"Remember, Kate, what Old Lady Phibben told Nat about white horses that time she told his fortune?"

"Yes," I said, trying to recollect her very words. "There was

something about a thin black stick, but first she said there'd be the white horses to watch out for. They'd try to break him, she said."

"Well, you see, that's what she meant," Rissa nodded, "not real horses the way we thought, but the salt water ones. Oh, dear, I wish we'd known before."

"It's queer her talking like poetry." I said.

Everything we read then became related to Nat for us in some way, but a large red book we pulled out of a bottom shelf is most bound up for me with those days. We began first by poring over the engraved pictures, most of which had to do with a great ship, fully rigged, and her crew of strange and bearded men. One of them had wilder eyes than the rest and a huge white bird dangled from his neck. Every page we turned the pictures grew more frightening, and yet we could not keep from looking. The icicles on the rigging and the driving snow sent shivers down our spines, and it was worse later on when the crew turned to spectres with staring eyes in ghostly sockets.

"Oh, Rissa," I cried, spellbound over the one that showed coiling snakes and sea-monsters, "Oh, Rissa, it's awful!"

And then she read me all about it. I can never hear a driven northeast rain at the windows without remembering those pictures and Rissa's voice reading "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". We quaked together and drew closer, and still we must keep on to the end, as if the old man's glittering eye was upon us right there in Fortune's Folly.

*"O, Wedding Guest, this soul hath been
Alone on a wide, wide sea,
So lonely 'twas that God himself
Scarce seeméd there to be."*

Even now as I set the words down on the page before me, my heart knocks at my ribs as it did that day I first heard them.

"O God," I prayed alone in bed that night, remembering, "don't let Nat feel like that, don't let him please. Amen."

I was to spend many hours over those pages before that winter was over. It was a long and bitter cold one, with such storms of freezing sleet that I was often away from school for days on end. I was much alone then, for in December Major Fortune took Rissa by the packet to Boston. From there they went on to spend Christmas with the Philadelphia relatives. Rissa was to remain till Spring. The Major thought it high time she attended a young ladies' finishing school and dancing classes. He counted on this change and new companionship to rouse her from her grim listlessness. Nat's frailness only caused him annoyance and humiliation, but Rissa's lack of appetite and spirit were on his mind.

"She'll pick up in a milder place," I heard him telling mother. "Her Aunt wants her to know more young girls, and I can fetch her back in May or June."

Rissa made no protests, though she would have preferred not to go.

"I'll write you, Kate," she said at parting, "and you write me, too. Be sure they don't touch a thing in Nat's room and mine."

After she went away, looking so beautiful in a brown beaver cap the color of her hair, and her green broadcloth coat, it was quieter than ever for me. The arrival of the big leather mail sack each evening became the most important event of each day, for shortly before Christmas there was a package and letter from Rissa. It was the first I had ever had all to myself and it lies before me now, the letters set down in her neat, fine handwriting.

"Dear Kate:—

Father and I got here day before yesterday, and this morning Aunt Esther and my cousins took me shopping. The stores here are enormous and we got presents for everybody and I bought this collar for you to wear on your plaid dress. Lace collars are very stylish here, also bangles and Roman sashes. I have one that looks like a rainbow, but the stripes go the wrong way, and I wish it was the other Rainbow instead. You know what I mean.

Father got a report from Captain Mac Murty from Bordeaux, and he says everything is all right, but he has had a time with Nat. O dear, I had to cry when he told me and when we went to church and the big organ played and I had to cry into my muff because I got wanting Nat to hear it too.

I start in at the Academy for young ladies after New Year's. My cousins go to it, but they know everyone there already and I don't yet. Please see that nobody breaks the vase with the china lamb on it in my room and be careful about dusting Nat's things.

Merry Christmas and happy new year from

Clarissa Fortune."

I sent her a handkerchief case that mother helped me sew, and I wrote to her too. But I didn't know where to send a letter to Nat. He was in my mind on Christmas eve when mother and I went to stay with the Jordan cousins down in Little Prospect. Cousin Sam was able to sit up a little by then. I helped Jake pick nut meats and make a snow man for the front yard, and it was fun when he took me sliding on his bob-sled.

"You're a lot nicer when those Fortunes are away," he told me with his widest grin, "I hope they don't come back again and stuff your head with fool notions."

"I like their notions, Jake Bullard," I answered him back. "You've got no call to make remarks about Nat and Rissa when they're my best friends."

"You'd better not say that in front of Sam Jordan," he warned me. "He's down on the whole lot of 'em."

Before we returned to The Folly I knew that was the truth. Cousin Sam Jordan was so bitter that even mother told George on the way home she guessed the accident had turned him sour.

Nat's letter to me came the last day of the old year. I carried it into the window seat in the east parlor and stared at my name in his funny, crooked writing and all the queer colored foreign stamps. There was just light enough left for me to make out the penciled letters that are even fainter now as I copy them down.

"Dear Kate,

Everybody on bord is writing letters to send off by a steamer when we get to Bordo tomorro maybe. Jim Jarvis from Little Prospect let me have his pencil and paper while he is up on watch, so I will write to you and Rissa. He was good to me when I was sea sick at first, so was Tom Rice. I am better now but my hands pretty sore from the ropes, and I have blisters to. I can clime to the yard arms and not get very dizzy, but I dont like it or carrying food out in bad weather. There are rats on bord and I have tamed one. He comes when I whisel a tune I made up and give him things to eat I sneak from the galley. He looks like Miss Ada Joy his nose is so long and his eyes little and blinky.

I do wish I was home again. They say Indyer will be hot as blazes, but Jim says you can buy bamboo pipes to play on there. I want one only my fingers have got pretty stiff. I miss Rissa and I miss you too and this is all the paper I can find so good-bye from
Nat."

Mother was calling me from the kitchen as I put the letter in my pocket and left the east parlor. It was striking six by the French enamel clock and I stopped to see the little figures come out and pull away with their cross-saw at the log that wasn't really there. When they would do it twelve times it would be another year. I thought how strange it was that years came and went like that, and it seemed to me suddenly that perhaps they were like the clock's unseen log that fell away, like time itsclf, under the woodsmen's cross-saw.

CHAPTER VIII

IT WAS June again when Rissa returned. I found a few late blooming pink lady slippers in the woods and had them in her favorite vase, and I carried in great armsful of white and purple lilacs for the Chinese jars in the hall. I waited by the steps in my new blue denim long before the packet whistled off the Narrows. But when the carriage actually drew up I turned shy and awkward and could barely muster a faint "Hello" when Rissa stepped out. She looked taller and much more grown up in the gray and cherry outfit that was of the latest fashion and far beyond Miss Addie's powers of creation. Even when she exchanged it later for last year's challis, I found her somehow unfamiliar. Her hair was tied back now, though it was as soft and curling, and her laugh was altogether different from the one she had taken away with her. She used queer expressions that I had never heard before. "You don't say", and "Pardon me" and "My heavens above" kept creeping into our conversations. I knew I could never manage to say them as she did any more than I could learn the waltz and those other dance steps she could do so easily. Only when we talked of Nat were we back upon the old footing, and we talked of him for hours on end those first days.

"He's been sick, you know," Rissa told me with a little worried frown. "Captain Mac Murty wrote father, but he said he was better again. It was some kind of a fever."

"I had a letter from him," I said, "but it was way back last Christmas. I hope he got that pipe to play on. When'll the 'Rainbow' be back?"

"Father isn't sure. He keeps saying a month and then it gets

to be two months and now he thinks not till late August or September maybe."

"But that'll be a whole year since the launching," I reminded her. "He'll be most twelve, when he gets back."

Little by little from Henry Willis and the Major we learned there had been difficulties aplenty on the homeward voyage. First trouble with her rudder in a tropical gale, and then a long delay putting in at some remote islands for repairs. This and an unaccountable leak in the hold, had caused considerable damage to the cargo of valuable merchandise she was bringing back. Major Fortune was worried by every fresh bit of news he got and no wonder. I had grown to evade the sly questions Jake and the others put to me about the return. Bad news always gets about and there were plenty to carry the gossip from ship-yard to village. The lumber mill was busy, but shipping slack, and when Henry Willis or the Major went to Boston on business neither returned in a cheerful frame of mind.

"But everything's bound to be all right once the 'Rainbow' gets back," I told myself all through that long summer.

Even in late August when the word came that she was in New York discharging what was left of the cargo to the agents there, it seemed she would never come. There were further repairs needed, and Rissa and I grew despairing. Still, it was something to see her name in the fine printed columns of shipping news the Major's newspaper carried.

"Seem's if they're spell-set for sure," I told Rissa in mother's best style. "Some say it's on account of that accident at the launching. You know how they said she was bound for trouble."

But Rissa wouldn't hear of such notions.

"It stands to reason," she reproved me, "that one man getting hit with a block couldn't bring them bad luck way off the other side of the globe." She looked a lot like the Major when she said that.

But I wasn't so sure. I had heard too many stories from Jake and George and others that winter not to feel queer about it.

Rissa pleaded to go to Boston with her father and Henry Wil-

lis when they went to meet the "Rainbow" there and return on the final lap. But they wouldn't hear of it, so she had to wait at The Folly with me for the great return.

She came in at last under full press of sail on the first morning of September. George sighted her before breakfast while she was still only a speck on the horizon. He was coming from the barn with brimming milk pails in either hand. He set them down so hard the milk spilled over, but he could only think of getting to the cupola to ring the bell that had always clanged to announce returning Fortune vessels. Its sudden peal brought us all out of our rooms. Rissa and I stood on the landing in our long nightgowns.

"She's back, Kate! She's back!"

"She looks to be most to Heron Island now," I squinted against the early light. "But there's a big stretch of water between that and Old Horse Ledges."

"She'll make it fast with this favoring wind and tide," George said. "I'm going to harness the horses right off."

He had promised to take us with him and we were into our clothes with a hastily swallowed breakfast before he had brought the carriage round. Fancy and Fanny were full of spirit as they took the ups and downs of the road, but not so full of it as we two beside George on the high front seat. Sometimes when the spruce woods shut us in for a mile or more and we lost sight of those far topsails, we could scarcely contain our impatience till we sighted her again at the peak of the next steep rise. Presently we heard the bells in the steeples of the Baptist and Congregational churches sending out stirring clangs on the salt air.

"Fit to raise the dead," George chuckled as we passed the oldest burying ground with its scattered, tilting stones. "Still," he added, "it ain't much like the days when there was two maybe three anchored off shore, unloading or waiting for orders to sail."

People hailed us from houses all along our way. They were full of questions and comments as to the probable time she would make. Men were cut in large numbers by the saw-mill

and later at the post-office. But we kept on down to the wharf. George put the horses in a nearby barn, and we followed him. There were plenty of warm kitchens where we might have waited, but neither of us could bear the thought of watching from behind a pane of window glass. We found a corner, sheltered from the keen morning wind, on the Fortune wharf. A pile of lumber made us a seat, and George came back to keep an eye on us every once in so often. Already several boatloads of men were preparing to go out to meet the "Rainbow". Every skiff and dory in the Harbor was filling up. I saw Jake Bullard in one with some older boys and waved to him. I thought that perhaps if I had been alone he would have smuggled me along.

We hardly talked at all as we waited there, but the long months away in Philadelphia seemed to drop from Rissa and for that hour we were as we had been a year before. The "Rainbow" was tacking in through the difficult channel between the islands. We could see her plainly now, and her sails were no longer new and shining. Patches of lighter canvas showed jaggedly on more than one of the dingy, wind-curved sheets.

"She don't look the same ship that went out," I said to Rissa with a sudden pang, for never before had I seen with my own eyes the change that time and buffettings can work on paint and canvas. Just for a moment I felt my throat tighten, and something I couldn't put into words took me, even there in the joy of waiting to welcome Nat home again.

But it was no time for such thoughts with the long prow pointing into the nearer channel. Now dark dots appeared in the rigging, and I marvelled that these should be men, who would soon row ashore and walk to their own doors, hailing families and neighbors as they came. George joined us again, shading his eyes against the sun that glittered in broken brightness on every lifting wave.

"Making it pretty, she is," he said approvingly. "A couple more tacks and she'll be past the black buoy. By Godfrey, I'd like to be aboard her this minute!"

Now we lost all but her topsails as she dropped behind Little

Heron Island. It was strange to see them moving so, above the ranks of dark tipped trees.

"Look," I whispered to Rissa, "it kind of puts me in mind of the pictures in that 'Ancient Mariner' book."

She nodded and her hands were clenched and chill to my touch. Then the prow pointed past the last rocks, and she came round to the mouth of the Harbor with a great flapping and rattling of canvas as she shifted sail. We could hear it plainly, we and the others who had gathered on the wharf. A quick murmur ran out in answer as if all of us there must have a part in the heart-lifting stir. Nearer and nearer she bore into the Harbor, the sun on every taut line and straining sheet. All the small craft stood off to give her room, even the crowded skiffs kept proper distance as was fitting so proud a return.

Anchor chains rattled. Canvas flapped and grew lax, and the group on shore and those in the boats broke into cheers that went out, thin and shrill across the narrow stretch of water. Other shouts came from those on deck to those in the nearer boats. We could scarcely stand still in our impatience. Now that she was in at last and almost within a stone's throw of us, it seemed that sails would never be furled or the little moving figures clamber down into the boats that clustered about the battered, green-filmed hull.

"Seem's if they'll never come ashore," Rissa sighed. "Why don't they hurry, George?"

"Got to make her fast first," he told us, "Fifteen minutes don't make much difference when you've been out a year."

"But that's just why"—Rissa broke off to wave her handkerchief frantically to the first boat starting back.

We got as close as we could to a wooden ladder that let down from the wharf to the water. The tide was in, it would be an easy climb. As the first boat came nearer we could make out Captain Mac Murty's big shape in the stern, and the Major's gray coat among the blue of the men. But there was no sign of Nat.

"Oh, dear," Rissa was almost crying with impatience, "I think father might have let him come in the first load!"

Everyone crowded so close to the landing place that we were pushed back by larger bodies and even George was too eager to help us. Suddenly we heard George call out:—"Hi, Major, here we be!" And then the little knot of people grew silent and fell back to make room for him. In another moment I knew why they had done so. He stepped slowly from the ladder, holding what looked like a bundle of blankets in his arms. Even as I stared, wondering that he should do such a thing, I saw the white triangle of Nat's face looking out from it.

There was not room for me in the carriage, so I had to trudge the three miles back to The Folly on foot and alone. I hardly knew how I went for my head was full of scraps I had heard on every side as I went through Little Prospect. The first boatload hadn't been ashore ten minutes before everyone knew that Nat Fortune was a very sick boy. I listened whenever I caught his name even though my feet were hurrying past every group by post office and doorsteps. Yes, they said, the doctor in Boston had told the Major Nat would have to be kept quiet in bed for months if his heart was to right itself. Chances of his pulling through were about even, I heard one of the blue-coated men tell several women who questioned him with concerned head-shakes.

"He wasn't bigger'n a spindle to start with," they reminded one another, "and now look at him. He'd have to stand up twice to make a shadow."

"The Major acted scared for once the time he come aboard and saw him." Another man put in.

"No wonder," chimed in one of the women, "he'll never raise him for the shipping or any other business."

"He'd better watch out that name he's so set on the boy carrying on ain't on a tombstone by Spring. I don't care what any Boston doctor says he's got the look right in his eyes, same's his mother had the last time I seen her."

"Tom Rice says it's all the Captain's doing. Says he dosed

him wrong time the boy took sick with that tropic fever, and made him get up 'fore he was fit to stand. Tom says he used to manoeuver to save the little fellow all he could, he felt so sorry for him."

"He was too little to go on any such voyage. I said so at the time and I say so again."

I was glad to be out of the clack of their tongues and the look of their faces, and when I got to The Folly at last I felt comforted to hear Rissa playing the piano in the east parlor.

"He wanted to hear me," she told me. "Oh, Kate, he most died, and even father's scared."

"I know," I said, and I tried to tell her the things I had heard them saying down in the Harbor. At least I told her what the men had said. I couldn't bear repeating all of it. She was frightened enough as it was.

They wouldn't let me go near his room till supper time when I carried up his tray.

"Hello, Kate," he said in a very small voice from the big bed he hardly dented as he lay there. "I brought you back another knife with a pearl handle to make up for that one you gave me I lost."

"You needn't have bothered," I told him, setting the tray down. "I'd be glad enough to see you back without any present."

"You've got big," he said, his eyes staring at me hard from the whiteness of his face against the white pillows. "Your hair'll be long enough to braid pretty soon."

It seemed wonderful to me that he should have noticed when he was as weak as all that, and I felt pleased and happier than I had been since the first boat load had come from the "Rainbow" that morning. Between us, Rissa and I coaxed him to take some soup. Turn about we fed him from the silver spoon with the curly F. on the handle. I don't know how I came to think of such a thing, but suddenly there sprang up in my mind a saying I had heard once somewhere.

"That's a spoon you'll sup sorrow with yet!"

PART II

CHAPTER IX

THEY say that every seven years our bodies are changed completely, and that we shuffle off our old selves as a snake its dried and done for skin. This may well be so, but though the snake shed its worn scales like a garment, there must still be the same stripes and spottings. So we kept our early markings of dispositions and bodies for all that we three had struggled out of childhood and were now at the end of our teens, ready to jump the gap between us and the twenties. Rissa had almost stepped into them, but she held back, as she had always done in the past, waiting for Nat to catch up to her.

It seems to me now, looking back on those years, that Little Prospect also grew with us from youth to maturity, and though Major Fortune fumed and swore at each new house that rose in the neighborhood, he could no more stop them than he could keep us children forever. The summer after Nat's return, while he was still creeping like a frail shade about The Folly rooms and garden, several cruising parties had anchored in the Harbor. We thought little of this at the time but later it turned out that they had bought land, four or five of the finest sites on the whole coast. Trees were already being cut and foundations dug for the houses that were to stand there by another spring. The Major was in a fine temper when it came to his ears that the largest of these was going up on Porcupine Head which stood out boldly to the southwest. It was land that joined the Fortune acres and had once been fine woodland which his grandfather had cut for early timber. Not finding it of further use he had sold it to the Rice family who had lived there ever since. Major Fortune had meant to buy it back someday, but there had

seemed no need of haste till the second growth of trees became valuable. Now it was lost to him and the offers he made were curtly refused.

"It's scandalous," I heard him tell Henry Willis as he sorted his mail one evening. "Old Dolly Rice let Porcupine and seven acres of land go to this man Drake for seven hundred dollars, and now he writes he wouldn't take eight thousand for it. I've a good mind to bring him to law about it. Any court would admit I had the right to an option."

"I'm not so certain of that," Henry Willis warned him. "A case like that can't be proved and it's sure to cost you more than it's worth. You won't notice it much once the house is built and the trees grown up again."

"I don't want Little Prospect ruined with a lot of summer visitors," the Major reproved him. "What we're coming to, I don't know. Next thing someone'll be proposing to run a summer hotel in my ship-yard!"

"If anybody makes you an offer you'd better take it," I heard his friend answer. "I'd rather see most anything there instead of grass and rotting wood and an office nobody comes to anymore."

The Major refused to notice this, but from the other side of the door I could see his long foot in its polished boot tap impatiently as he went on with his reading.

"I suppose you put Harding up to writing me about that lumber," he said presently. "He says here he's got the contract for four of the new houses?"

"No, I didn't, but he's a smart fellow and he'll pay you a good price. Looks to me, Nathaniel, as if you'd better make the most of your timber even if it does go into houses instead of ships."

"Not for any of these blights they're planning to raise round here," the Major snapped. "I haven't come to selling my birth-right for a mess of summer resort,—not yet!"

"*Tempora mutantur*—" the other began, but the Major cut him short.

"Yes, yes, I know,—the times are changed and we are changed

with them. That's all well enough in Latin, but I mean to cling to what dignity's left in this steam-run world!"

I slipped away from the hall without their hearing me. I knew the beginning of the Major's favorite topic and had no wish to hear it all over again. I think I should be more patient with him now, understanding as I do the pang that comes with seeing time devour natural loveliness and the most cherished landmarks laid low in a single night. But then it was the old gulf of age between us. Rissa and Nat and I did not dread change as he did. We strained at our moorings, like ships ready to take the unknown blue. I rebelled less at staying in familiar waters. They had proud sea-faring blood in their pulses, and already it was stirring them. Not that they actually wanted to go to sea. No, Nat had had his full share of that. Indeed he could seldom bring himself to speak of that voyage, and sometimes at a careless word or joke he would go pale and the clouded look would come over his eyes making me guess he had been reminded of the "Rainbow" and all he had endured aboard her.

A small brown dog had followed him back from the vessel and refused to leave his bedside those low months before he could be up and about. Frisky, he called her, and once when we were alone he told me how he had found her in a strange port and smuggled her aboard and fed her bits of food from the galley. But Captain Mac Murty had found out and seized her.

"He took her by the scruff of the neck," he told me, "and hove her right over into the harbor. She swam round and round the ship, crying. She'd have gone down only for Tom Rice. He jumped in and brought her back. They had a kind of set-to afterwards about it."

His eyes darkened with such hatred when he spoke that I was frightened even there with the little dog safe against my knee. That voyage had changed Nat, but not in the way his father had meant it to. It was his feelings and will that were toughened, not the light shell of his body.

But even when the doctors made it plain that Nat would never be able to go to sea or do the sort of work he had planned

for the boy, his father kept on trying to turn him into the son he wanted. So, from the time he recovered and could be about again, Major Fortune set out to make a scholar of him.

"We'll put a spur in the boy's head if he can't have one in his heels," he said, and from that day Nat had a string of tutors to cram him full of learning. A frail body would be no handicap in that line. I think already his father saw him a Judge, in command of a courtroom, instead of a quarterdeck. Nat took it quietly enough. He had learned by now that open rebellion would gain him nothing.

"I've got plans of my own," he used to tell us sometimes. "You two just wait and see."

The piano was no longer forbidden to him provided he did not let it interfere with his studies. Sometimes, when he would have set-backs and be propped up in bed for weeks at a time with fever and what the doctors called "heart murmurs", he could not go to the east parlor. Then he would scrape away at an old fiddle we found in the attic or play on the bamboo pipe he had brought from an eastern port. I never tired of hearing him call music out of this, particularly one tune which he had heard boatmen play as they passed in their flat bottomed boats. "The Muddy River Song" we always called it after he told us about the brown water and the brown faces of the men under the strange dark sails. To me it is still the loneliest tune I have ever heard, the most plaintive and sad. Sometimes when I asked him for it he would laugh and tease me for leaning to sorrow. I marvel now that it should have meant anything to me then. But youth is a time when we know so little and can feel so much. It was as if something deep within my young flesh answered that music that was so infinitely old and sad and wise. It was like a warning in me that said:—"Listen well, for some day you will know the meaning of this."

And then I would run out into the orchard maybe, to bring in red and yellow apples, or pick wild strawberries in the meadows, or help with the churning, and feel the free strength of my arms and back, and the swelling of my breasts, and my feet

stepping so light and sure in my scuffed shoes, that I would forget all but my own well-being. I would be gay as a long-legged colt turned out to pasture in Spring and shake my thick braids and even sing a snatch of tune in the low, mumbling way I had that Nat said was like bees, nuzzling into a clover clump. I was too healthy a creature not to be mostly careless and hopeful. I was confident in my own vigor, and my wits were not yet sharpened by love or physical pain.

Now as I hold the small faded picture of us in my hands and let the late light that comes up from the sea, rather than down from the sky, touch our three faces once more, I can see how even then I was of different stuff from those other two. Not that I am belittling my young self, for now that I am old and changed I do not think it is vain of me to say that I was pleasant to look upon. But I was a rooted thing always, with my feet firm on brown earth. With my sandy colored hair and freckles, and my round, warm cheeks I do not wonder that that strange visitor, Dick Halter, said I was most like a russet apple tree in fall. He came to tutor Nat the summer before he went away to college, and it was he who took the photograph of us, the only one in which we three were together.

Rissa was just nineteen that summer, and I nearing eighteen with my school days behind me and a broad smile of contentment on my lips. He took the picture of us in the garden on the stone bench by the syringa bushes. Rissa's lap was full of their four petalled stars and I held a great bunch in my arms. Nat sat between us with the little dog Frisky between his knees. It was a warm June day and Rissa and I in cool dresses, hers of white dimity and mine of stouter gingham. Frisky's tongue would keep lolling out of her mouth, and the hair on Nat's forehead still shows in damp, flattened points. He was the youngest of us, and yet I can see that he was oldest in a way, for though his full lips were smiling, his eyes kept the grave, deep look that he never lost after he came back from that year at sea. I know now that pain and a too early knowledge of the ways of men put it there. The same dark brooding look I found in the

picture of a dead poet whose name was Edga. Allan Poe. It troubled me to read what manner of man he was and of the demon of music that had possessed him also.

It is a better likeness of Rissa than of either Nat or me and there was reason in this. To Dick Halter she became the center of every picture from the first day he set foot in Fortune's Folly.

"He's not so much to look at," Nat told me the day Dick Halter arrived. "But he can stand up to father and he's fallen for Rissa already."

"Does she like him?" I kindled to the possibility of romance.

"Well, you know how she is," Nat laughed back at me, "she'd never let on, but I can tell she likes him better than any of the other tutors or the beaux she danced with in Philadelphia last Christmas."

"Is he old, Nat?"

"Twenty-three, and he's going to be a painter. He wants to go and study in Paris. Father told him he was a fool to waste his time on such nonsense. But he didn't mind. He just laughed and said 'every man to his own taste'."

Dick Halter did wonders for Nat that summer, indeed he was good for us all. He was such a plain, shabby young man and so solid and slow moving. Yet he had a curious force and energy that one felt, even from his first, strong handshake. He had been poor all his life and he had the easy adaptability of one who had had to fit himself into the lives and ways of others. He liked comforts and good food as well as anyone, but he could go without them for months on end. Even then he showed traces of the power and perseverance that his good nature hid at first meeting. He was like the iceberg I had read about in my geography, only showing a fraction of itself above water. But there was nothing cold about him. He was one of the most warm-hearted, generous creatures alive. Nat's quickness and changing moods were like flint to his steel, and his pleasant patience seemed to put some kind of spell on the high-strung, excitable boy. Perhaps they got on so well because they were each con-

sumed with a desire to make something,—Dick Halter with his brushes and paint, and Nat with keys and fiddle strings and those black notes and bars he was forever setting on paper. Other tutors had tried to keep Nat from his music and so had set up a wall between him and his studies, but this young man urged him to his books that they might have more time for what they each wanted to do. So Nat made more progress that summer than in the three years before. The Major was doubtful of the method, but he couldn't deny the results. He admitted Dick Halter's ability though he deplored his misguided notions, and when the portrait of Rissa was begun, even he was partly won over.

During those first weeks of his stay Dick Halter contented himself with filling notebooks full of sketches in pencil or rough crayon colors, pictures of anything and everything he saw. He did trees and wharves and islands and ships, but it wasn't long before we found out that people were what really mattered to him. It seemed queer to me to see how quickly he would work, with broad, rough lines and patches of color. But when he was done,—there I would be maybe picking cherries, halfway up a ladder, or churning in the springhouse, or hulling berries on the back porch. I have some of these little pictures yet that he gave me. They tell me that if he had bothered to put his name in the corner they would bring a good price because they show how even in his early work he struck out for himself, not trying to copy the ways of other painters. We often teased him about this and I remember I asked him once why he didn't take more pains to make his things look like the pictures in books or on The Folly walls.

"If you did," I told him in my young ignorance, "then perhaps people would buy them and you could make a lot of money."

He shook his head.

"You see, Kate," he explained, "there wouldn't be any use in that. I must paint things the way they look to me. If I saw a

tree and it looked bright blue I should have to make it like that, no matter if everyone else saw it green."

"You'd be crazy if you did," I laughed, for I could talk easily to him.

"Maybe," he answered, going on with his painting, "but if I was crazy enough it would be all right. People would see it my way too. Someday I'm going to paint a picture of you and you'll be surprised how you look to me."

"Well, don't you go and make my hair blue," I cautioned him.

"I won't," he promised, "but if I told you I'd put green and purple in the shadows to make it look red, you'd say I was crazy again. I expect you look like one kind of person to me and still another to that fellow named Jake who comes to take you out in his boat sometimes."

"No," I insisted obstinately, "I'm exactly the same to everybody."

It was that same day that he told me I put him in mind of a russet apple tree. I thought it a very queer notion at the time, though I can see now what he meant. I know that I could have been prodigal of my fruit in a good season. And I have often thought that it may not be as simple as it seems being a tree and bearing fruit that maybe is never picked, but lies unwanted, rotting in sweetness all about the roots. For a tree may not choose what it will bear, and we who seem to be so free in our lives are perhaps no less bound to bring forth what we must. I know this now, and my heart fails me often, thinking of the harsh and bitter fruit it is given some to bear and the sweetness of others that goes untasted season upon season.

Dick Halter had never seen anyone like Rissa and he loved her from the first. All the feelings she roused in him he put into her portrait. It seemed as if they ran from him through his thick, sure fingers till the very paint and canvas were somehow kindled. He told me long afterwards when I spoke to him of it, that he hardly knew how he could have done it with so little experience behind him. Unskilled his fingers may have been, but

his heart carried him. He started it in mid-July and it took him most of the summer for he had only an hour or two each afternoon when the books were put aside and he and Nat free. She sat to him in the old boathouse where he kept his paints and brushes and the square of canvas on a sort of stand he made. Rissa complained that flies came up from the water, and that she had to miss drives and boating trips with some of the young people she had come to know in the summer cottages. Still, I think she really liked sitting to him.

Nat and I often dropped in to see how it was progressing and even Major Fortune did on a couple of occasions. He had pooh-poohed the idea at first, but I know he preferred Rissa to be in Dick Halter's company than gallivanting about with sons of his June to September neighbors. Rissa was far too pretty not to attract attention wherever she went. The Major could no more have kept her free of admiring young men than he could have kept the bees out of his honeysuckle. So the invitations to picnics, to sailing and supper parties grew each year as more and more new houses appeared along the shore. These were not the sort of people the Major tolerated. They might have money, but it seemed as if the more his own prosperity dwindled, the more he came to resent it in others. He took it as a matter of course that Rissa would marry someday, and marry well, but it would not be to a "summer rusticator" as these outsiders were called in Little Prospect. As the days went by and Rissa's portrait grew on the canvas down in the old boathouse, even he had to admit there was a likeness to her.

Dick Halter painted Rissa sitting with her back to one of the windows. The overhanging roof kept all sunlight away. Only a queer greenish glow came through willow leaves and up from the water below that at high tide slapped and gurgled against the wooden piles. It was always cool there on the warmest summer day. Rissa grumbled sometimes that it was dismal and indeed it did give a curious look to us all, so that even my own freckled hand appeared remote when I would hold it out before me in the dimness. She rebelled at first because he made

her wear a last year's dress which had faded to a faint cream from its earlier yellow. When he had got a little way along I saw why he had chosen it to bring out her own clearness of face that a brighter tint would have spoiled. It was as if you saw her looking at you from the bottom of a well, or in the green twilight of a very old wood. "Portrait of a young woman in summer" he called it when he had it hung in his exhibition years later. It was noticed and remarked upon there among the pictures he had learned to paint with greater skill. Yes, Dick Halter painted better than he knew. I could have cried when I came upon a blurred, newspaper print of it and saw Rissa again as she had been that summer, looking out in all her soft young dignity and grace. If you have ever seen a green leaf bright against its own shadow, you will know how Rissa looked on that square of canvas.

That was the summer of 1885 and just before Nat left for his first year at Harvard their Aunt Esther Marlin and her daughters, Jane and Bessie, came to visit at The Folly. The Major took it into his head to give an evening reception during their stay. It was partly in their honor, but I think more because Rissa had turned into a young lady.

"It's high time you came out," he told her one evening as I brought in the lamps to the east parlor after supper, "and your aunt agrees with me. She'll be here in time to make the arrangements. We'll show some of these summer folks we know how to entertain as well as they do in New York and Philadelphia. By Jove, we'll make them sit up and take notice!"

"How about some music, Sir?" Nat was eager.

"Music? Certainly." For once his father accepted the suggestion. "We'll have the piano tuned and the harp strung and get some players down from Portland. You young fry can dance in the east parlor,—no, better have a tent on the lawn. I'll get them to bring canvas from the ship-yard. There's plenty stored there. Henry's off to Boston next week so you'd better write out a list of what you want. Nat'll be needing evening clothes, but I've written your Aunt Esther to bring Rissa's dress."

"Will my portrait be done in time?" She asked Dick. "It would look nice hanging over there across from mother's."

"I haven't any frame," he told her. "They cost a lot, and besides,—" He reddened suddenly looking down at his shabby clothes, "you see, I haven't a black suit, so maybe I'd better not be round."

"Nonsense!" Rissa cried. "We wouldn't have a party without you."

"And Kate, too," Nat gave me one of his quick looks. "We'll have to teach them to dance between us."

It was easier to find a frame in the attic for the portrait than to make dancers of us. Still, Nat and Rissa persisted, and we learned to fit our feet to the beat of a waltz and a two-step. First Nat would thump out the music while Rissa guided Dick Halter up and down the middle of the hall, calling out her one-two-three's breathlessly as they went. Then she would take the piano and Nat would have a turn with me.

"I can do it all right alone, Nat," I told him after one particularly poor round, "but somehow I can't seem to fit my feet to yours."

"I know," he laughed good naturedly. "You dance sort of like a tree or a bush trying to. Now Dick's just plain clumsy, and you're not. You just have to go your own way I guess."

Somehow I couldn't mind he was so pleasant about it.

But there was no time for such goings-on once their Aunt Esther and the two Philadelphia cousins arrived. I remembered her with dread, and my feelings had not changed with the years. I was setting a jar of dahlias in the hall when the carriage drew up and she bore down on us all like a human ship under full press of sail. Her shot-silk skirts rattled before and behind her; jet beads flashed on her full bosom and in her ears under the small, stiff hat. I might have been the newel post for all the notice she took of me standing there.

"Mercy, Nathaniel," I heard her exclaim to the Major as she swept into the parlor, "I don't know how you expect to make this place presentable in a week. Everything looks old enough

to have come out of the Ark. That's what comes of leaving things to a housekeeper. You wouldn't know a chair needed fixing till it fell under you I suppose."

I hurried back to the kitchen to report the arrival to mother and Rose, glad indeed that they had not been within hearing.

"That woman's a slave driver, I can tell from one look," Rose said as we washed and dried the supper dishes later.

Her predictions were right and it wasn't long before the Major's sister had put us all to work with a vengeance. She made him seem pleasant and easy-going by comparison and by the end of her first day mother and Rose and Annie Button were in open mutiny. The Folly looked as if a cyclone had struck it with curtains down, carpets being turned and beaten, and furniture all shifted about. Nothing had been changed for years in the great rooms, and since there was not time to renew the covers of chairs and sofas, all hands were pressed into turning the green damask. Even the flighty Jane and the plump Bessie were put to odd bits of sewing, over which they frowned and took on as if they were being worn to the bare bone. Their presence and their mother's changed the household as completely as if a keg of dynamite had been set off in our midst. I think I should not have minded it so much except that Nat and Dick Halter took themselves and their books to the boathouse through the whole week of preparation. That left the three girls and the Major's sister in full sway, and Rissa hardly noticed me now that her cousins occupied her so completely. Suddenly I found myself an outsider, who belonged by rights in kitchen and pantry. I had been so familiar in my comings and goings, so one with the two young Fortunes, that it came as a shock to my seventeen year old pride. I couldn't bring myself to speak of it to mother who was put-out enough as it was.

"I'm like to die and be buried before this week's out," she complained to Rose as they got down china and glass that hadn't been off the top shelves for years, and polished dozens of silver spoons. "And not a please or a thank-you in the lot of them."

"That bold-faced pair don't deserve to get husbands," Rose

chimed in. "You'd ought to see the state the spare room's in. They step out of their silk skirts and leave 'em like birds' nests anywhere, and the top part clear across the room like as not."

"I hope they don't put notions like that in Rissa's head," Mother exclaimed. "She's got plenty as it is."

"There's a pile knee deep on the floor," Rose went on, "left for me to pick up and wash and iron. But I stood right up to them about it. I haven't a minute to spare from now to the party, I said, and you'd ought to have seen the looks they give me."

"Now, Kate," mother cautioned me, "don't you go making yourself an easy mark. That pair'll ride over you rough shod if you don't watch out."

"All they've got in their headpieces are fancy rigs and beaux," Annie put in from the ell where she was kneading bread. "They've got George most crazy taking the horses out any time of day, now when he needs 'em for errands. They're a caution, those two."

"Worse'n all the summer company, part and parcel." Mother polished the last spoon with her cloth as if she were wiping the whole tribe off the face of the earth.

Later that morning when I went upstairs with fresh towels I heard the girls' voices coming from Rissa's room.

"Mother says it's a disgrace to have servants who don't know their places." Bessie said in her lazy drawl. "She says they always get the upper hand when there isn't a mistress over them."

"Of course," Jane put in, exactly copying her mother's crisp tones, "it's too late to do much with the old ones. They're too spoiled by now, but mother says it's a great mistake treating that girl as if she was just like you and Nat."

The color flooded over my face and neck as I waited there on the hall landing for Rissa's reply.

"Well, but Kate isn't a servant exactly," I heard her hedging.

"Her mother's your housekeeper, isn't she?" Jane insisted.

"I know, but it's different here from Philadelphia. We've known her ever since we were little, and she can read and write

and,—and everything. She might even get to be a school teacher I guess, if she wanted to."

I could tell Rissa felt uneasy and wanted to change the subject, but the other two were determined to keep her to it.

"When people work for you, they're servants." Although I could not see into the room I knew how Bessie folded her lips over that last statement. "You ought not to let her call you by your first name any more."

Rissa said nothing in answer and Jane followed up her sister's words.

"She's got the makings of a good lady's maid, mother says, if you took her in hand right now before she gets spoiled like the rest. We're going to have one between us next winter when we come out and go to the Assemblies."

"Are you really?" Rissa tried to distract them by her admiration. "I thought girls didn't, not all to themselves I mean, till after they got married."

This started another subject, one to which I was already growing familiar.

"And mother says you'd better make the most of these summer people. It's about your only chance of a good catch way off here unless you have a season with us or one in Boston. Those Drakes who built the big house on the next point are rolling in money and the son we met down in the village yesterday wasn't half bad looking."

Rissa laughed.

"He's as stupid as a crab," she told them. "I've heard all his stories ten times over. I know when he opens his mouth what's going to come out of it."

"You're a fool to waste your time on Nat's tutor." There was no love lost between Bessie Marlin and Dick Halter as I well knew. "His clothes look as if he'd slept in them, and I can't see that he says anything worth listening to, so you needn't be so snippy about Will Drake."

"Yes," Jane's voice came in a shrill echo of her sister's, "he's dull as ditchwater. I don't care if he did paint your portrait. It's

not much to look at and I wouldn't marry an artist for anything and be poor all the rest of my life."

"Oh, goodness," I heard Rissa sigh, "Who said I was going to marry him? I never thought of such a thing. I don't think he cares about anything but his painting and besides I'm too young."

"You're nineteen next week," Bessie pointed out firmly, "and that's plenty old enough. I'd die if I wasn't engaged by the time I'm twenty."

"She's had two proposals already, and I've practically had one."

I turned away knowing that they were now embarked on the endless topic of their love-affairs. But I couldn't put all that I had heard out of my mind as I went about tidying up their room. It was as Rose had said, clothes strewn in every direction. I stooped and gathered up the bits of underwear that were finer than any I had ever seen, much less touched. Bessie had left her green taffeta flung over a chair and I stood over it a long time. It was a soft, rich green and the full skirt billowed out the way young spruces grow, thick to the roots. It had narrow bands of black velvet at the sleeves and little black bows like dark butterflies all down the front. I don't know how it was, for I'd never bothered much about what I put on my own back, but I felt a queer hankering after that green dress she hadn't even bothered to hang up in the wardrobe.

When I got back to my own room again I stood by my bed and looked at the dotted white muslin mother and Rose were helping me fix over for the party. It was spread out there with the new blue sash, and my best black slippers with the shiny bows. Somehow nothing looked right to me anymore. I kept going over and over what I had heard on the upper landing, and though I told myself I didn't care what those two silly girls said, still, I knew I did. It wasn't that I had ever set myself up to be like Nat and Rissa. I'd always known they were different craft from me and heading for different waters. But we'd been so close and shared so much those seven years that I'd expected

it would always be so. I couldn't help wishing Rissa had spoken back to them and said we were friends and always would be. I felt sure Nat would have said so and I wished he'd been there. For the first time I began to know what Jake Bullard had meant by the things he said about the summer people; why he was always telling me to get clear of Fortune's Folly.

"I'll give myself airs, too, someday," he had said to me only the week before when he brought a load of clams up in his boat and we stopped to talk. "I tell you it makes me sick to hear the 'rusticators' call us 'natives'. I'll show 'em someday."

I heard the dinner bell ringing and on my way downstairs again I stood a minute by the mirror in the upper hall. I think it was the first time I had ever looked at myself as if I were somebody else and not Kate Fernald that everyone knew and took for granted. Mother had been pleased with my looks of late and had said more than once that I'd turned out better than she'd expected. I wasn't slim and graceful like Rissa and never would be. Still, neither was I plump and stuffed looking like Bessie, or scrawny like Jane. Maybe I was too tall and broad shouldered, but I stood straight on my long legs, and my ankles were not thick like some. My old blue cotton dress made my eyes look bluer than they really were and I had the freckles that go with sandy hair, even if mine had grown out into thick chestnut braids that wound twice round my head. My mouth turned up like a Jack-O-Lantern, I decided, staring hard at my reflection, but my teeth were strong and even when I smiled. Standing there alone with myself in the hall, I remembered Major Fortune's words on our first meeting,—"A square-rigged girl and no mistake!" and the old hurt, self-consciousness came over me again. I wondered if I looked like a servant, the way those two had said. I thought as I turned away at last, that I might screw up courage to ask Dick Halter that. He'd be the only one I was sure would tell me the truth, for I wouldn't dare mention it to mother or Jake and Nat wouldn't want to hurt my feelings.

But I had no more time for mooning in front of mirrors or

for overhearing things not meant for my ears. Those next three days were a frenzy of preparation and I forgot everything in the excitement of seeing crates unpacked and boxes and bales arriving by the packet. The tent went up like a huge white toadstool on the lawn and the first Japanese lanterns I had ever set eyes on were hung the last thing before sundown of the great day. For all their complainings mother and Rose and Annie got into the spirit of things and outdid themselves on the cold spread in the dining room. I think now that their festive spirits may have been brought about by early samplings of the punch the Major had prepared with his own hands and sundry bottles brought up from the cellar. It looked wonderful in the great silver punch bowl with sprigs of mint floating on top and an island of ice in the middle. There were other bottles being chilled and watched over by Bo in his best suit and two men from Portland had come along with the musicians and mysterious kegs that Nat told me were full of "ices in lace petticoats". He stayed with the musicians from the minute they arrived. There were no lessons that day and he knew his father was in a good humor. He tried picking out tunes on one man's fiddle and he was all for having them play a Chopin piece from Rissa's music book.

I can't remember sitting down to a meal all that day and I know my head felt light and queer when I went up at last to get into my finery. It was a still, clear night,—not a hint of fog over the easterly islands and Whale Back Light bright across the Narrows. Though it was early September the air was soft and warm as August, only the crickets' greater clamor and the earlier fall of darkness marked the season. Several boats full of guests from Rockland and along the coast had already anchored in the inlet, their lanterns like fallen stars.

The little dog Frisky had been underfoot all day and just as I was standing on tip toe to see myself in the small mirror there came a scratching at my door. I went to open it, my hair not yet pinned up and my dress only buttoned as far as I could reach up the back. And there was Nat smiling behind the dog, already dressed in his new evening clothes. I stood stock still to see him

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so changed,—a young man suddenly for all he was so slight and boyish. He looked like one of those old silhouettes in the wide frames that hung in the lower hall,—all black and white. All at once he seemed to me a finished person, so clear, and pale and strange that I felt half afraid as I stared.

"I'm glad I struck you dumb, Kate," he said. "Bessie and Jane didn't think so much of me, but then they're after bigger fish tonight."

He hadn't been in my room for months and I felt shy having him there with me. He had come to beg me to keep Frisky in the ell, away from the noise and music.

"Leave your handkerchief with her," I told him. "She'll be easier with something of yours to worry and sniff at. I expect," I added, "she's going to take on something fearful when you're off to college next week."

His eyes darkened at that and I was sorry I had reminded him of it.

"I wish I wasn't going," he said slowly, still leaning against the door frame and making no move to go. "Dick Halter's lucky. Nobody to stop him from going off to Paris and doing what he wants to do. I wish I were going there with him."

"Then I wish you were," I said, "though it's a dreadful long way off."

He gave a short sigh and shrugged his shoulders in the way he had.

"Turn round, Kate," he said. "I can do those buttons you can't reach between your shoulders. I've just helped Rissa with hers."

It seemed queer to have him do such a thing for me, and yet right, too. I was mortally afraid mother might come by and think I'd been putting him up to it. She had prim notions about such things.

"You look nice," he told me when he had finished. "It seems funny, doesn't it, that we're all three grown up now and Rissa having a reception and all?"

"Yes," I confided to him, "every time I pin up my hair I

think I'm just dressing up and playing at being a lady the way we did rainy days in the attic."

"I like yours this way." He took one of my braids in his hands. "It's so long and straight and shining."

"I'd lots rather it was curly and brown like Rissa's," I said, though I was pleased at his compliment all the same.

"We'll have our dance together, Kate, don't forget. Only I've got to jig-it with all the girls I see sitting down first. Aunt Esther made me promise, and she'll see I do my duty. But I'll sneak out when I can. You be on the look-out."

He went down the hall whistling and my fingers were all thumbs as I set the pins in my hair and tied my sash. I always felt different with Nat, happy and secure, as if we were the only two people in the world. It was like the old days when we sat close together over the green-backed copy of Hans Andersen, with anything, maybe, going to happen, but not too soon. I lost the feeling once I shut the door on Frisky and went downstairs. No one was about in the hall and parlors and it seemed like a strange house to me, with all the furniture pushed back against the walls. It was as if the world outside had crowded them out of their familiar places. Somehow I couldn't help a feeling that it was the same with me. Yes, it came over me with a sort of chill that I was only part of the furnishing of that place, no more than one of the chairs or sofas or tables.

As I fled from the house and that thought, I ran into Dick Halter. His kind, keen eyes and shabby suit cheered me and we went together to see the lighted tent. All the Japanese lanterns had bloomed miraculously into colored flowers, sprung into being without root or branch. From the dark garden I could smell marigolds and dahlias, and the air that came up from the water was faintly damp with weeds and salt. In the tent the musicians were tuning their strings with a soft, fitful twanging that put me in mind of larger crickets than those in the grass underfoot.

And then as we reached one of the openings in the canvas those four inside bent themselves to strings and keys and began to try over one of the waltzes. I knew the rhythm well from

having heard it thumped out on the piano, but this was the first time I had ever heard it mount, singing and sweet, from harp and fiddle strings. As if in answer to a signal Rissa and Nat appeared from the other side of the tent, and without haste or hesitation, stepped out on the floor to dance. Like figures in a dream they moved effortlessly. It was as if the music were some lovely essence that they themselves gave out to the night air. Rissa was all in pale pink, her full skirts fluted like the drifts of bloom on a flowering almond bush. The warm, colored light of the lanterns fell on her bare arms and neck. There was a look of grave delight on her lips and wide open eyes. Beside her Nat seemed more than ever slight and dark, as if he were the stem and she the flower. Indeed they seemed not to be two separate persons, but a single being. I sensed, rather than felt, that they were so for as long as the music played. Neither smiled nor spoke and they passed so near the gap where we stood I could have reached out my hand and touched them. It seemed to me then that some secret current guided their bodies; as if the moon compelled them as it did the tide. It was too beautiful to last. I knew it even as I watched from the outer darkness. I told myself that it must come to an end, but I said it the way we say sometimes, "I, too, must die", only half believing.

"Lord," I heard Dick Halter exclaim as the musicians lowered their fiddles, and those two broke away from one another. "I'd give ten years of my life to put them on canvas the way they looked just now!"

He broke off with a sigh and I knew how he felt.

Guests were beginning to arrive and there was a tremendous bustle and babble from that moment on. Wheels grated and hoofs crunched on gravel as carriages drew up to the door. Their swaying lanterns made the long driveway between the spruces alive with moving lights. I hurried back to the house to help Rose upstairs as I had been told to do.

"I've counted fifty ladies a'ready," she confided to me when we were alone among all the outspread wraps of silk and wool and velvet. "And there must be as many more men folks. Listen

to 'em down there. Such a clatter puts me in mind of the way the gulls carry on over to Fiddler's Reach when you come by real near in a boat."

"Yes," I said, "you can't hear the music in the tent for all the talking. They say every room in the Tavern's full up, so many came clear from Bangor."

"You go on down now and enjoy yourself," she urged me. "The most of the crowd's here and I can manage alone. Here, back up, and let me tie your sash in a better bow. You've sat it out a'ready."

But still I hung back, dreading to step into that terrifying whirlpool of people below.

"Go along, Kate," she almost pushed me out of the door. "And mind, you're not to help in the dining room or pantry. Annie and your Ma and waiter men can do it. You've got as much right to a good time as anybody."

I went with thumping heart, and when I found myself in the midst of so many unfamiliar faces I felt all of a panic, worse than having to speak a piece the last day of school. The Major and his sister, with Rissa and the two cousins, stood under the family portraits in the east parlor. I could only catch an occasional sight of them for the press of people coming up to pay their respects. I felt lost, wedged in a corner, with only now and then a face from Little Prospect to smile at me,—old Doctor Robbins, or Reverend Chase, or Miss Ada Joy in her best black silk and lace shawl. Henry Willis came by and I followed him out to the dining room where there was almost as great a crowd eating and drinking.

"Well, well, Kate," he said, smiling at me from behind his spectacles, "so you've grown up, too, along with Rissa! My, it seems only yesterday you stopped at the office to get warm on your way to the Folly."

"Rissa looks lovely, doesn't she?" I said, "And Nat. It most scares me to see him in that new black suit."

We drank a glass of punch together, and went to look at the dancing. The tent was filling up with couples and there was Nat

taking one girl after another out on the floor. Rissa and her cousins had come out now, leaving the parlors to older guests. I knew Henry Willis was anxious to be back there, so when I saw Dick Halter, also watching, I went over to his side. He looked almost as out of place there as I felt, and a flood of gratefulness for him came over me.

"Aren't you dancing with Rissa?" I asked him.

He smiled and shook his head.

"No chance to so far. But she's promised to have a bite of supper with me soon."

"Let's get some now and take it down to the boathouse," I suggested. "You can't lift a spoon hardly there in the dining room for the crowd."

He thought this a good idea and together we carried out plates and sandwiches; some of the pink ices and cakes, and a whole pitcher of punch that mother had saved out in the pantry. After the hot rooms the night air felt reviving on our faces as we went down to the shore. I could feel the coldness of wet grass against my ankles, and a full yellow moon was up above the trees, brightening all the nearer and a farther waters.

"Accidit ut luna plena esset," Dick Halter said. "That's Latin, Kate, and it means 'it happened that the moon was full'. They had moonlight nights, too, all those years ago in Rome and Pompeii, strange as it may seem."

I made him tell me the words again, saying them over after him as we went down to the water together. That is why they have always stayed with me, though they are all the Latin I shall ever know.

To our surprise there was a faint light in the boathouse beside a lantern hung over the landing steps. I hadn't thought that maybe men from the anchored boats might be there and we both stopped uncertainly with plates and pitcher in hand.

"That you, Kate?" I heard my name, and suddenly there was Jake's broad face showing in the light of a lantern.

CHAPTER X

I KNOW now that a day or night or even a certain hour can set its mark on a person as surely as a flood tide will leave a shell or bit of kelp stranded far from its accustomed place, or fireweed show bright where blackened ruins have long since grown over. It was so with me that night of the reception. I can look back to it and see that it changed me, though to all the rest of the household and even to myself, I was no different when I arose the next morning. But changed I was. Never again could I step back into the easy ways of childhood, for I had been stirred by what I was still too innocent to name.

Love was in the very air of Fortune's Folly that night. The lights and the music and all the voices that met and mingled and are now scattered and gone, made it seem real somehow, almost like a light wind going by. A queer sort of summons, that was one with crickets and fiddle strings, made the young dancers in the tent draw closer and speak in whispers with shining eyes, and the middle-aged in the parlors keep up a steadier chatter. I was more tired and flustered than I knew from all the hard work and excitement of the week just passed. The things Rissa and her cousins had hinted at had unsettled me more than I guessed. For the first time I had become sharply aware of my body and the new stirring of my senses. Now, as I sit alone and write the word "I" and the word "me" on the pages of the ledger, my hand trembles. It is as if I were writing of someone else, for when I turn and face the mirror, it gives me back an old woman. Though we go by the same name, we are not one any longer. That Kate Fernald in the muslin dress and blue sash, with the braids of hair about her head, and the wide warm

mouth and smooth brow is dead and gone as surely as if a gray stone with dates and such devices as a dove or a crown or a harp were raised over her. But she can come back to disturb my sleep, as all of us may be disturbed by our own freshness and modesty and half-timid, half-reckless ardor. Her young flesh was sweet and firm and her eyes clear, but troubled as a spring will be at the first pebble that breaks the surface of its calm.

Well, there was Jake Bullard in his blue coat with the brass buttons, an old one of Cousin Sam Jordan's. He had no further need of it now he was house-ridden after the launching accident, and now that Jake was grown he wore it for best when he went to church or took parties out sailing in his boat. It wasn't much too big, for Jake had grown into a square, broad shouldered fellow the last few years. I realized this as I hadn't before when he stepped from the boathouse door into the moonlight. Indeed he gave me such a start that sandwiches tumbled from the plate I was carrying.

"Jake," I said, "you scared the life out of me! What're you doing down here?"

He gave me a long look before he answered.

"I fetched a party over from Bennett's Landing," he explained with considerable pride. "I'm to wait and sail 'em back. I told George Button to tell you I was down here. You took your time coming."

"Well, George didn't tell me, and this is Mr. Dick Halter, you know, he teaches Nat and paints the pictures. This is Jake Bullard," I added, a bit flustered at our all meeting there.

"Hello, Bullard," Dick Halter waved the pitcher in greeting. "Kate and I brought down some refreshments. There's plenty and I guess you'll be glad of some if you've got that wait ahead of you."

"Thanks," Jake spoke awkwardly, "I wouldn't mind wetting my whistle."

We followed him in with the things which we set on the table beside his lantern. We three sat on the steps going down to the water where several skiffs were fastened. The tide was half-

way up, making a soft sound against the wooden piles. We could hear the music coming down faintly from the tent and the voices of men on two of the anchored sloops as they called across to one another.

"Been up yet and had a look round?" Dick Halter asked as we sat there solemnly eating and drinking.

"No," Jake helped himself to another tumbler of punch. "What would I do up there spreeing it? I'm here to earn ten dollars. It's what I ask for a night's work, but I don't have to make a fool of myself same's some do."

"It wouldn't hurt you to take a look at the dancing," I said. "You like the Portland Fancy yourself, and the contra."

But he shook his head.

"Don't think much of summer people, I take it?" Dick Halter went on.

"Well," Jake was growing more talkative as he ate and drank, "it depends how you look at 'em. For payers, they're not so bad, and I figure on making all I can long's they're such fools with their money."

"I'm not belittling money," I heard Dick Halter tell him in his pleasant way that even Jake couldn't take offense over. "God knows I've had to make every dollar I've had since I was fourteen and it hasn't been easy going. But, still, there are things I wouldn't give up doing for all the money in creation."

I knew he meant his paints and brushes and the pictures he was going to make with them someday. But I knew, too, that he was thinking of Rissa and what a difference money would make when it came to telling her he wanted to marry her. Presently he got up and said he must be getting back to the party. I knew he would be hunting for Rissa and I didn't like to tag him any longer, so I stayed on with Jake, seeing that he wanted me to. The pink ices were running into their little lace papers and we ate them up between us.

"He's better'n most of that lot," Jake said when we were alone. "He don't give himself so many airs, if he is a fool about

money. I guess he wouldn't make too free with you like some of those city fellows."

"Why, Jake," I said, only half guessing at what he meant, "I don't know why you're carrying on so. There's hardly one of those others up at the party I know to speak to. They think I'm just—" I broke off for I couldn't bring myself to say the word that was troubling me. "I'm just so much furnishing to them."

"Well, you leave 'em alone, Kate. I've seen plenty of goings on this summer."

"Cousin Martha says you've made most a hundred dollars with your boat and odd jobs. She says you're counted the smartest boy in Little Prospect."

I couldn't see his face for the dimness, but I knew he was pleased because he reached out and squeezed my hand.

"This summer's nothing to what I've got planned for next," he told me. "I'm going to buy that big sloop of Joneses and paint her up and take parties out regular. Then I'll get some of the boys to sell me their fish and clams and lobsters and I'll do the peddling round. You can ask a bigger price if you bring things right to their doors. Yes, Sir, I figure by the time I'm twenty-five I'll have a pretty fair start, and I won't stop there either."

"But that's most five years off," I reminded him.

"It don't matter so much long's I'm on the right track. I'd a heap rather be on my way up the hill than going down it same's the Major is."

"The Major's got plenty, I guess, even if business is slack the way they say. Look at all his land."

Jake gave a short, unpleasant laugh.

"Yes, look at the way he's selling it off. It's common talk he's let that fifty acre wood lot go the other side of Jubilee. They're bringing a gang to cut it next month."

I felt more aghast than I wanted him to see.

"Well, what of it?" I told him. "The Major knows when to sell and it won't show much way over the other side of the mountain."

"Everyone says they jewed him down and he was a fool to let it go. He'd better of hung onto that and let some of his shore front go for summer houses. That's where the profit is now. I expect that jamboree up there," he jerked his head towards The Folly, "cost him a lot of money, and where's the good tomorrow when it's all over?"

"It sounds nice, though, down here," I said. "That's a waltz they're playing. Nat's teaching me how to do it."

"Now don't you mix up with that sort of thing," Jake's voice grew hard as it always did when I was foolish enough to mention either of the two Fortunes.

I was sorry I had let it slip out and as I listened to the distant music I recognized it for the one Nat and Rissa had danced to before all the people came. I had been more pleased to see Jake than I would have believed I ever could be. He seemed like something strong and dependable and he had missed me. I felt all at once what most women crave, whether they admit it or not, a longing to be wanted; to come first with some man. It had been a jolt to me, being somehow alone up there among all those people, with Nat and Rissa too busy to give me a word or even a look. Now my hurt pride was eased a little, for I couldn't help knowing I mattered a good deal to Jake Bullard. Not that he'd ever said so, but I knew, and lately mother and Cousin Martha and even Rose and Annie had twitted me about him.

"Kate," I heard him say, almost as if he had read my mind, "I think a whole lot of you. I guess you know that a'ready."

I couldn't believe my ears. I would as soon have expected one of the spruces or a rock or even Jubilee mountain itself to speak up as to have Jake say such a thing. I could feel my face getting red and my heart pounding under my ruffled dress front. But I tried to answer him same as if it wasn't anything to put me in a flutter.

"And I think a lot of you, too, Jake," I said.

"That's good," he went on, "then we don't have to bother saying it again. I'm not much hand with the gab and you ought to know it." His arm slid round me and I could feel his breath

warm against my neck. His stiff shock of hair brushed my cheek. "But it's all right long's you and me know how it is. I wasn't going to say a thing yet, only when I come here tonight it kind of riled me seeing you all dressed up and jigging it round up there. I didn't want you to go and get any notions."

Even though a queer numb panic had come over me, I couldn't help feeling pleased that he had thought that, so I didn't pull away as I had half a mind to.

"I haven't got any notions," I told him.

"Shucks," he laughed, "all girls have. That Nat Fortune's the poorest spindling fellow from here to Portland, and you come on the run if he crooks his little finger. I've seen you."

"Well, but Nat's different. There isn't anything I wouldn't do for him." Jake made a cross, scraping noise in his throat and I hurried on. "We've been together, the three of us, ever since we were little, and he's off next week for college."

"I hope he stays there for good and all." Jake was holding me very close now, and talking faster than I had ever heard him. I began to think of the tumblers full of punch he had had and I wondered if that might have had anything to do with his suddenly loosened tongue. "Don't you say a word to anybody, Kate," he was going on, "but I'm laying my plans and you're in 'em, too. I'm going to get my hands on a lot of money, and *be* somebody round here. You just wait and see if I don't. We'll show folks what's what, eh?"

"What sort of plans?" I wriggled a little free of his hold and thought to distract him.

"Never you mind." He gave another of his short laughs and held me tighter. "How'd you like to live up there in The Folly someday?"

"But I do now, Jake." I could feel the callous places on his big hand as it pressed my bare arm.

"I don't mean same's you are now." He spoke as I had never heard him before. "I mean if it was ours, the way it's going to be someday."

"Jake you're crazy!" I was honestly shocked by his words. "I guess you've had too much of that punch. Mother said the Major put I don't know what all into it."

"I'm not crazy," he told me, "or drunk either if that's what you mean. Only you remember, and keep your mouth shut, and don't worry if we have to wait maybe a long spell before we can get married and set up."

My head began to buzz like a hive of bees and I felt myself struggling up from the step beside him. But he got up too and still kept hold of me. I could feel his heart hammering away under the blue coat and my hair caught on one of the brass buttons and came tumbling down over my shoulders.

"Oh, Jake," I panted, trying to catch the falling pins with my free hand, "you'd ought not to talk like this to me. Somebody might come by and hear us."

"Well, let 'em! Everybody down in Little Prospect knows you're my girl. But we won't say no more now. Come on, let's have a kiss?"

I had no time to answer or draw back. I was frightened feeling his lips hot and heavy on mine, and too dazed to move a muscle. It didn't seem real to me somehow, not even the roughness of his chin that set my face burning hotter.

"There," he said, letting me go at last, "I guess we've sealed the bargain. Don't you forget it now."

I don't remember how I left him or how I went back to the house. My heart was going it like a woodpecker at my side. I pressed my hand there to ease it. Yet I couldn't have told whether it was fright or shame or a queer kind of excited pleasure that made it go so furiously. I was like a wild thing running between the spruces, with my skirts damp about my ankles and my hair half falling down. As I ran I heard those fiddles and the piano and harp playing a two-step, and the lanterns through the branches were bright as little spying eyes. Then I heard someone call my name, and I stopped at the edge of the driveway, knowing it for Nat's voice.

"Kate," he said, "I've been looking for you. Let's have our dance."

"Not out in the tent in front of all the rest," I begged, pushing the loose pins into my tumbled hair. "I couldn't do it."

"All right we'll dance out here then if you don't mind wet grass. What's the matter? I never saw you look this way before?"

But he didn't press me when I made no answer. We did the two-step there all alone on the dark lawn at the edge of the tent and somehow I wasn't as clumsy as I'd expected to be. He made even my unaccustomed feet go through the right paces. When the music stopped I clung to him as if we had been little again, playing games in the attic or hayloft.

"Oh, Nat," I found myself saying, "I wish——"

"Go on, say it." His dark eyes smiled back at me, though his mouth was grave.

"I wish things didn't have to go and change," I said, "the way they have to."

"I know," he said, and for some queer reason those two words comforted me.

I left him there and went up to my room. Frisky welcomed me in the dark with lappings and whines. I undressed without lighting a candle and lay on my bed listening to the music and all the voices below. The little dog's body was warm at my feet, but I shivered under the bedclothes for a long time. My head throbbed with going over and over all that the night had brought me. I was sorely troubled and alone. I heard mother pass my door and I called out good-night to her, feigning sleepiness lest she should come in and wonder at my wide staring eyes.

After awhile there began to be sounds of horses and wheels on the gravel and I knew from the shouted good-byes that the party was breaking up. Later on I heard the faint splash of oars and voices from the water. They were singing "Good night, ladies."

Then that dwindled to a fine thread of sound, and died,

leaving only the crickets and a far beating of sea on the outer ledges.

The party was over, but the tide of life it had brought to Fortune's Folly had left a mark on at least one member of that household.

CHAPTER XI

FORTUNE'S FOLLY was suddenly cleared of youth as if a broom had swept it clean away. I alone remained that fall, like a forgotten apple, left to the frost on a stripped bough. I felt more lonely for those other three than I knew at the time. I seldom went into the silent parlors and I avoided the boathouse, since it had become too full of associations for me, both happy and disturbing. Rissa, I missed as I might a half-indifferent, beautiful older sister; Dick Halter because he had been so kind, so ready to counsel and share with me his wider world. But Nat took the very savor of life with him when he went. I might have been the piano in the east parlor, which was a dumb thing now without his quickening touch.

Mother was gloomy, too, dreading more than I the shutting in of winter, and the cold that gripped her now at the bones and joints. She missed Rose, who had also left soon after the reception to go back to her old home. She had lost a married sister some months before, and too urgent calls had come from her brother-in-law and his brood of children to be denied. Even mother had favored her return.

"Yes, dear," she had told her, "you can't deny your duty to that snarl of young ones that are your own flesh and blood. You take him now, while he's still bereft, before he hunts out some flighty, chicken-headed girl to marry. For that's what he'll do if he stays single long enough."

"Lord, Mis' Fernald," Rose had giggled, not at all startled by the idea. "My poor sister hasn't been buried four months yet. You'd oughtn't to go and think such things, much less voice 'em!"

"I can see the writing on the wall as well as the next one." Mother had been unshaken in her predictions. "Once you get the place and the young ones in hand, you can have what you want out of him, even if you are most forty and given up for an old maid."

Rose had turned scarlet under this flow of advice.

"Well, time will tell," she had answered. "Not that I'd have looked at Bill once. But I guess I've about had my fill of working for other folks. Yes, I guess I could do worse for myself."

Such cool and practical plans for marriage were a shock to me. I didn't see how she and mother could take it all for granted like that. Besides I was beginning to guess that there was much that concerned the marriage-bed which I did not rightly understand. The girls at school had whispered things together in corners, as girls will. And I had a queer jumble of disjointed facts which had lain fallow in my mind for years. These I now began to recall and to sort out in secret, fitting them as best I could with certain sights I had seen about the barn when male and female beasts answered the call of their kind.

I could not bring myself to question mother. She seemed too remote from such doings. There was I, living proof that she had been wanted and taken, yet I could scarcely believe that she had been courted and wed in her time. I might have gone to Rose, but she had left, and Annie Button was too staid and deaf to be any use to me. I was friendly enough with the girls in Little Prospect, though now school was past we were somewhat scattered. Besides I continued to feel a little shy of them, and they were not quite at their ease with me, resenting as they did my intimacy with Rissa and the Fortune ways I had picked up. So I put two and two together as best I could and the Bible helped some, though there were parts in the Old Testament that both scared and puzzled me. "The Song of Solomon" in particular, could stir me to inward ponderings. I used to keep the old Bible open to that in my lap and read over the beautiful, singing words, while the Reverend Chase droned away in the pulpit and mother dozed beside me. My cheeks would flush as I read:—

"I sleep, but my heart waketh; it is the voice of my Beloved that knockeith saying:—Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled."

It was all dim and mysterious, and it drew me like music. Then, as I sat with the Bible still on my lap, I would seek out Jake in the Jordan pew across the church. Maybe our eyes would meet and he would give me a sheepish grin. And I would be more confused than ever, trying to fit him in with Solomon's Song. I knew I could never call Jake Bullard "My Beloved", or even think of him that way. It was all troubling to a young and untried heart.

But I liked to have him wait for me after church among the tilted stones of the graveyard. It was pleasant to walk back together for Sunday dinner at Cousin Martha's, and to have him fetch me home at sunset in his boat. We had few words to say to one another, but I took his presence gratefully and didn't mind the occasional sly kisses or squeezes. I was glad if he praised my new beaver hat or the coat with the squirrel tippet mother had contrived for me from a cast-off of Rissa's. Mother was openly pleased that we had started to keep company. She could talk more freely to Jake than I; they chaffed and teased one another as I could never have done.

"You're a queer, deep sort, Kate," she chided me sometimes. "You'd ought to make more of Jake now he's singled you out. Lucky he's close-mouthed, too, and don't mind it. I declare sometimes you two act about as sociable as a pair of clams when you're together!"

I thought she would have been surprised to know how Jake had carried on in the boathouse the night of the reception. But I said nothing. To others she spoke of us with satisfaction.

"Yes," she would say in the village. "I couldn't ask for it to be any different. He's never had eyes for another girl from the time they was children. 'Course, he has his way to make, and he's got sense enough to wait till he's put some by before they

can start to set-up together. So I won't lose her for a good spell yet, and I don't have to worry 'bout her being an old maid."

Several of my school mates were also linked with Little Prospect boys. Cousin Martha's Ruth was keeping company with Will Stanley who had gone to work in a store in Rockland. He brought presents enough to turn her head when he came back for one Sunday every month.

"I tell him he'll spoil her for housework," Cousin Martha would sigh as she fingered the yards of soft cashmere, or the new glass beads he had brought. "She always was one to put all she could on her back and leave the dishes go and the beds un-made till ten o'clock in the morning. He won't be so foolish over her once he's had to eat scorched chowder and soggy bread."

"He's got a right to pamper her if he wants to," mother would say. "It don't last long, dear knows, once they're married and the babies commence coming."

The only fault she could find with Jake was that he brought me no gifts. He was too saving of his money, and while she commended him for this in public, in private she sometimes remarked that a present or two wouldn't come amiss. But Jake had no use for such nonsense. He told me so often enough. He and Ruth had been brought up like brother and sister instead of cousins and had small use for one another. Hilda, the younger girl, wasn't so pretty as her sister, but everyone agreed she was smart as a whip. She had no regular beau as yet. I think the boys were all a little afraid of her sharp tongue. Figuring had always been easy for her and that winter she went every day to work in Blodgett's General Store. Old Mr. Blodgett was something of a fuss-budget and he said she kept his books in better shape than they had been for years. Hilda took after her father's side and was thin and spry and dark. She never missed a sociable if she could help it and she always out-danced the rest of us every time.

Of my old schoolmates, Sadie Berry had been closest to me. She was older by a couple of years and by reason of greater experience. She came of a large family and was by far the pret-

tiest of several sisters in her blue-eyed, pink and white way. Her hair was yellow as dandelions in bloom, and her body plump and neatly made. She might have had her pick of the boys for miles about, but though she liked them all, she couldn't seem to settle on any one.

"I've got time enough for that in a year or two," she told me. "I don't want to get tied hand and foot for awhile yet. I mean to see new places and folks and have some fun while I'm young."

"Don't you want to get married, Sadie?" I asked her.

"Oh, yes, I s'pose so. But not right off. You know how it is, once the ring's on your finger, it's dishes and baking and babies from one year's end to another. Maybe it's different with you, but I mean to kick up my heels while I can."

"How're you going to?" I questioned her.

"Well," she told me mysteriously. "I'm not burying myself in Little Prospect another winter."

So I wasn't much surprised when it came out in September that she was going off to Boston to work in a hotel. A girl who had been nurse to some children in a summer family had helped her get the place. There was a lot of disapproving talk about it in the village. I stood up for her against Annie and mother who acted as if it were nothing short of a calamity.

"I don't see where's the harm in it," I insisted.

"Well, maybe you don't," mother was short with me, "but you will someday. Her mother'd ought to put a stop to it, 'fore the trouble's too late to mend."

"But it was all right when Rose came here to work," I pointed out.

"It's different working in a respectable place for a private family. I've heard all about those city hotels and what goes on in 'em. I'd take to my bed if you ever thought of such a thing!"

"Yes," Annie was almost as disapproving, though less vehement. "It's taking an awful chance, but Sadie was always the bold one of that Berry brood. She's too pretty to give her free

rein same's her mother does. Well, I hope she keeps her head, but it ain't likely she will with all that yellow hair on it!"

I still thought them unreasonable, though there was no further use in argument. I managed to smuggle out my best silver bow-knot pin as a parting gift to Sadie the day before she left. It was a pretty pin that Rissa had given me once on a birthday. I knew Sadie liked such things to wear, and I have always been glad I put it in her hands.

"Good-bye," I told her, "I'm going to miss you a whole lot."

She had walked partway back with me and now she was turning away in the late fall sunshine that made her hair look even brighter than it did indoors. Her cheeks were soft and pink as she kissed me.

"And I'll miss you, too, Kate," she said affectionately. "Maybe if things turn out good I can get you a place up to Boston. 'Twouldn't do you and Jake any harm to be apart a spell, and you'd have some money of your own that you wouldn't have to account for to anybody."

I shook my head and smiled. I knew it wasn't for me. I couldn't just pick up and go like that, though now I know I could have gone to the ends of the earth to answer the summons of one I loved.

"Well, then," she laughed as she left me, "you write me all about what goes on this winter. And if nothing happens, same's usual, you write me just the same. You're good with your pen and I'll answer if I can get the time."

Next afternoon I watched the packet go out through the Narrows with Sadie on board. I could make out her little figure waving from the bows, and I waved back with a towel from the upper hall window. There was another one gone, I thought, feeling new loneliness as I went back to my sweeping and dusting. I had taken over a good share of Rose's work now that school no longer tied me. It had been mother's idea and I had fallen into the plan without protest. The Major had spoken to mother of late about cutting down household expenses. He had met with certain reverses, he told her, as if everyone didn't

know all about the idle ship-yard and his selling out his interest in his vessels one after another. Only the "Rainbow" was left to him, and she cost him more each year than she brought in. Often she was laid up for months and if she was lucky enough to be sent out something always happened. She'd never had a good name in shipping circles and repairs cut into her profits alarmingly. Henry Willis had given up urging the Major to let her go to any bidder, and now there was none to take a sailing vessel off his hands.

Mother thought it only right that I should help about the place now I was grown. But she made it plain that I was only doing so in exchange for my board and room. I was not to be paid wages as if I were a maid. She wanted me near her and it would fill in my time till Jake should be in a position to set a definite date. I don't know what she told Major Fortune of this, but he seemed to favor me more now that I had such prospects. Looking back on it, I think he perhaps shared his sister's feeling that my early intimacy with his son and daughter might have spoiled me for plain ways and the village girls and boys. He didn't like Jake much because of his Jordan connection. Sam Jordan had been a thorn in Major Fortune's side ever since the ship-launching. Still, he was civil enough to Jake when they met, which was seldom. Major Fortune had much business in Boston that fall and was away, taking Bo with him, for weeks on end.

October was beautiful that year past all believing. Or perhaps this was only because I was more acutely aware of it in all my newly sharpened senses. Heretofore the gold of oirches and maples, the orange of berries, and the flame of blueberry leaves and swamp maples had been enough in themselves. But suddenly they had become disturbing, for besides their own actual shape and color, they seemed to mean something else; something that I needed another heart and mind to share. I had no means of easing myself of such a load of loveliness as crowded upon me from every roadside and pasture. I did not know the reason for this, or guess that my lonely restlessness was a sign that I had put off forever the self-contented cocoon of childhood, when no

other person is necessary to pure rapture. Maybe towards the last this state will return to me, and the long and difficult middle years when our lives are too closely bound to others will seem as strange as those early, simpler ones do to me now. But that fall I was at the mercy of every colored leaf and berry; stripped bare to the brief shining of that northern Indian Summer. I might have been a chestnut freed of its burr, or a snail without its shell, set helpless in a too-bright world.

I was filled with notions that I only dimly understood. Things I had read long ago in books came back to me with new meaning, and sometimes I would be stirred by flashes of truth that both frightened and soothed me. I remember once coming through the spruce woods in late afternoon and being moved by the way the sunlight struck in between the close-packed brown trunks, roughened by lichens on their north sides. It shifted quickly as I stood watching. Now one group of trees would be brightened till the drops of resin glittered on the bark, and the needles on high branches shone like steel. And then, suddenly, these would go dull and dark as the light moved on to quicken another group and yet another. It came to me in one of those flashes of insight that are rare to most of us even in a lifetime, that it was like that in the world. People, I told myself, are never all in the sun at the same time. When it lies warm on one, another is in deep shade. I think Moses himself before the miracle of the burning bush, could not have been more shaken than I at this revelation.

And there was no one to whom I might tell it, only Nat's little dog Frisky, with her anxious, dumb eyes and her stump of wagging tail.

I stayed indoors as little as I could while the good weather lasted. There was plenty of picking and gathering to be done about the place and mother most lenient with my strayings.

"Enjoy it while you can," she would say, "winter'll be on us 'fore we know it, and a spell of false summer like this is bound to mean an extra cold one."

"There's an old butternut tree up the creek," I told her one

morning. "I've a good mind to take the punt and row up there with the tide. I could fetch a couple of baskets back."

I didn't tell her the rest of my scheme which would not have pleased her. She did not see me fill a basket with apples, and another with winter vegetables. I sneaked out a jug of new cider from the shed, and got them all down to the boathouse without mishap. I bailed rainwater out of the old punt and stowed the things in at the stern to keep her well trimmed. Frisky had followed me to the shore and begged so to go along that I hadn't the heart to refuse her. Since Nat's going she had attached herself to me and stuck closer than a burr. Being so much with Nat in his illness she had grown to be almost human and I took great comfort in having her by me. The punt was a clumsy boat, with heavy oars between stout wooden pins. I should have found it heavy going but for the tide that had started running up from sea. Although it was so much later in the season it put me in mind of that other trip the three of us had made up country so many years ago. The swamp maples and sumach were still scarlet and birches golden between the crowding spruces, although the water near shore was thick with their fallen leaves. I rowed close sometimes to let them flutter down upon me in an incredible rain of yellow or flaming red. Nat would have liked to do that, I knew. It would have set his spirits off to a new kind of music. I missed him more as I came to the ledges where he had played to the seals. But the rocks were empty. No sleek bodies mingled with the brown kelp that moved with the current; no round heads bobbed up as I passed. The seals had grown too shy to venture so far inland now.

The butternut tree wasn't half as distant as I had made out to mother. I tied the punt and went up to fill an empty sack I had brought. It was hot picking and stooping and I was tired by the time I had dragged it back to the shore. Frisky had had her fill of chasing chipmunks and was glad to rest and help eat the lunch I had fetched. The sun stood high overhead and the grass was shrill with crickets. Their chirping was like the beat of far music, which I heard through the nearer persistence of my own

thoughts. For the last week or so I had been possessed with the idea of Old Lady Phibben and my untold fortune. The hornets had cheated me of it nearly eight years before and of late I had thought much of what she had told Rissa and Nat. It seemed to me that I might be less troubled by the future; by my keeping company with Jake, and by all the other inner questionings that teased my mind, if she would read the cards for me and look at my outspread palm. Most of all if I could hold her lucky stone in my hands, I felt I must be helped. I was practical and hard-headed enough in most ways, but I couldn't forget what she had said to Nat about watching out for the white horses. I was drawn to her as only the young are drawn to what cannot be rightly explained in everyday terms.

I knew the old woman and her son still lived at the mill, though every year people in the village thought they could not stick it out there another winter. Crazy Tim I had seen sometimes in his fishing boat, and though the summer people objected to his queer looks and still queerer speech, and said he ought to be sent away to the home in Rockland for such oddities as he, no one in Little Prospect bothered to take him there. He was harmless and as long as the pair of them could get along, they were left in peace. I had felt bold enough when I set out, but by the time I came in sight of the place, I was half ready to turn back. At first it looked deserted. Then I saw smoke coming from the makeshift chimney. I tied Frisky to one of the seats and fastened the punt to an overhanging beam. Just as I was telling myself I was in luck to have the son off, I heard one of his thick grunts and saw him above me on the tottering planks. He looked wilder than I remembered and his animal-like sounds set Frisky barking fit to rouse the dead.

"Hush, that." I said to her sharply, and not knowing how else to deal with him, I handed up the baskets and jug. He took them with more grunts and grins, and not without qualms I climbed the slimy ladder that led up.

The barking had brought Old Lady Phibben to the door. She was little changed from my last sight of her, being the dried,

spare sort of woman who might have been fifty, or a hundred years old, for all one could tell. I thought she looked like a grasshopper, and I half expected to see her take a leap into the air, or begin fiddling with her long, skinny arms. I could tell she hadn't an idea who I was and I had a time explaining this to her above her son's gibberish and Frisky's barks.

"There, now, Tim," she spoke with firm kindness to the excited fellow, "it's all right. You bring those things in and go back to your fishing."

He dumped the baskets inside, seized an apple and made off grinning foolishly. I followed the old woman in to the one room. I remembered it dimly from the other visit, and it amazed me to see her geraniums in tin-cans in the sunny window; her well-kept stove and kettles, and the bed with its quilts in the corner. A ladder led to a loft where I think her son must have slept. There were braided mats on the floor, and faded cushions on the two chairs each side of a table covered with a worn cloth of rich red. We sat down on either side of it and gazed at one another for some time. Her hands lay in her lap, and they were so brown and scrawny they put me in mind of those star-fish that children dry for keepsakes.

"So," she said at last after she had looked me over to her satisfaction, "you're the one the hornets stung so bad, and now you've come back for your fortune."

I nodded dumbly and said the apples and vegetables were a present, along with the cider, but I'd be much obliged if she would give me back the baskets and jug. She rose and emptied them and returned to her chair.

"I expect you sneaked off to come here?" She kept her keen, old eyes on my face. "Your mother'd never of let you go off on any such chase."

"No, she doesn't know," I admitted. "You made us promise not to tell anybody the other time, and we never have."

She looked somewhat mollified.

"I'm glad you kept your word," she said, "it's more'n some do.

You've turned out good," she went on studying me from head to foot in a way that made me blush, "not that I could tell what you looked like before with all those hornet stings. I hear the Fortune pair are off to the city again."

"Yes," I told her, "Rissa's in Philadelphia with her cousins for the winter and Nat's at Harvard college."

"Still pindling is he?"

"Better," I assured her. "lots better now, though you were right about the white horses. We didn't know what you meant till after the Major sent him away to sea. How did you come to know they were called that in poetry?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," she broke in. "I only told what I saw in his hand. I don't explain, I only tell what's there. You have to make what you can out of it."

"Oh, of course, I thought maybe if you'd look at mine," I spread out my two hands on the cloth and leaned across the table searching her old face. "And if you'd let me hold that lucky stone, too."

"Remember that, do you?" She looked pleased. "I ain't had it out for a long spell, maybe it don't work no more."

I saw she was only teasing me, so I smiled, and waited.

"A party of summer folks come here last July," she went on, "and tried to wheedle me into fortunes. Don't know where they'd heard it, but I wouldn't let on I knew a thing. It's risky business. They might complain and have us sent away somewhere, specially if what I saw wasn't to their fancy."

"You don't have to be afraid of that with me," I promised.

"You don't look like one to go back on your word," she said, still keeping her eyes on me. "'Twas thoughtful in you to bring the things. I ain't had a decent apple all fall. Yes, I guess I'll trust you, Kate Fernald, what'll it be, the cards first?"

"You only did Nat's with the stone and his hands," I decided, "that'll be enough for me."

She went away to the back of the room and fumbled in a wooden chest, while I waited anxiously. Outside the crickets

were more than ever clamorous, and though the sun came warm through the checked curtains, I felt suddenly cold along my back bone. But before she began she questioned me further.

"I hear things ain't so prosperous with the Major," she said. "His trees don't carry the name round the globe same's they did once."

"Well," I hedged, not wanting to commit myself. "He thinks sailing vessels will come into favor again, but Henry Willis says steam is here to stay."

She nodded.

"He was due for change, I told him so years back 'fore it commenced. But he's one you couldn't give advice to. They held their luck too long; thought 'twould always last. But it's like a tide, been on the rise for Fortune's a long spell; now it's turned and low water's setting in."

My loyalty wouldn't let me agree with her.

"Oh," I said, "I guess it'll be all right, even if shipping isn't what it used to be."

"I know how 'tis," she wagged her grey old head. "He won't swallow his pride. It'll be the end of 'em all someday, that girl and boy of his, too. When I was young the old folks used to say 'Many a tree furnishes the handle of the axe that fells it!'"

I was too impatient waiting to know my own future to heed her. But the saying has stayed by me, and her words come back sharp as axe blows.

"Yes," she went on, "lightning's most apt to crash in a high steeple. That's another thing they used to say, and it's true. But, there, it don't mean nothing to a young thing like you. Give over your hands, now, and I'll tell you what I see there, good and bad alike."

I couldn't keep them from trembling a little as I stretched them across the table.

"Strong," she said, and her voice dropped to a softer, more remote tone. "My, what a life-line! Not a break in it. You'll live to be an old woman, and you'll keep your health through thick and thin."

"Yes, yes," I murmured to hurry her on. This was not what I had come to hear.

"You've got a good head, too," she continued, tracing with her spidery forefinger. "Slow, maybe, but sure, and you'll work things out in your own way in secret. No one'll ever tell you what road to take. You'll find it alone and it won't be easy going." I must have shown my disappointment, for she turned to another line and went on more briskly. "You've got a heart that's bigger'n your head, child. It's wide enough to take in a raft of people and those that find their way to it'll never be turned aside when they come knocking. There's plenty of love in it, too." My flagging spirits quickened to this and she smiled. "Love's what they all want to know about," she said, "but it's only the one kind they ever have in mind. Girls always want to hear 'bout who'll come courting. I only see love or hate plain, not the one it's for or from. But love's written all over your palm. It runs out between every finger, like streams overflowing a well. You've got a giving hand, not a taking one. It's always one or the other."

"But there'll be someone to love me?"

"To be sure there will," she bent closer. "Two of 'em, as different a pair as a red-winged blackbird's two sides. One's dark, and one's red, and their ways lie far apart as the poles. One'll bring trouble and pain, and the other easy, quiet ways, and which you'll take I can't say. But when the time comes you'll follow your heart and not your head."

"Tell me more about the—the dark one?"

She gave me a swift look.

"He flies high," she said, frowning at my palm, "very high against the sun. If he falls it'll be far and a great noise there'll be and many echoes of it. You're earth, child, all earth, and he's fire and air. Yes, you're born of different elements, you two, but hearts may agree though heads differ. You'll be close even with seas between."

"And the other one?" I pressed her.

"He's earth, same's you are, only you're made of fruitful soil

and he's born of granite and iron. Watch out his love don't turn to flint and do you hurt someday."

"Oh, dear," I said, "it scares me when you talk that way!"

"You asked for the truth and the truth is what I'm bound to tell you." But she patted my hand as she spoke. "Don't let it trouble you, your heart'll always see you through, Kate Fernald, so just you give yourself to it when the time comes. And now for the lucky stone."

She gave it over and I held it first in one hand and then in the other. Watching me closely she seemed pleased and once more nodded her head.

"Same's I thought," she told me, "you take a firm grip; but not too tight a one. Your fingers open and close easy. Remember how the Major's girl gripped it? 'Twas like a vise. But you're one that knows when to let go."

She took it from me and hid it again. When she returned she was all for every day matters, and her voice had lost the deep, far note that had been in it. Though I still kept my hands on the table she no longer looked at them. I couldn't draw another thing out of her save questions about Little Prospect doings and whether the Major had spoken of selling off more wood land. Seeing she was through with me, I rose to leave.

"Good-bye," I said, "Thank you for telling my fortune and—"

She cut me short.

"Mind now, I didn't tell you a word. I'm much obliged for those things. Poor Tim and I'll relish 'em a long time. I expect you won't be this way again soon."

I agreed to that.

"Mother says winter'll be here before we know it. She thinks it'll be a hard one."

"And so do I. Tim's laying in fish and wood to see us through it. Yes, I wish 'twas over and spring here a'ready. My grandmother used to say she never felt right till she'd got past May Hill, and I'm the same."

The tide was well up as I left and the ladder not so steep and

slippery to climb. Crazy Tim came out from the woods and made me know by his queer motions that he would give me a tow back in his boat. But I shook my head firmly and made haste to push off. I had no wish to be seen in his company and have mother ferret out my afternoon's visit. Frisky barked furiously till we were round the point and out of sight of that uncouth figure.

The sky was still blue, but faint feathers of cloud had sprung up out of nowhere. "Mares's tails, furl your sails", I said aloud as George Button had taught me to when I was a child. I knew as I said it that winter had come, though the sun felt hot on my bare head. I got the punt headed into the current. As my arms moved with the heavy oars, my heart still beat fast to the memory of Old Lady Phibben's words. They stirred me, with a sort of foolish excitement I couldn't explain. Yet she hadn't told me what I had gone there hoping to find out.

CHAPTER XII

I HAD half a mind to write Rissa of my visit to the ruined mill. Indeed I wrote out my fortune, word for word, as well as I could remember. That is why I have been able to give it so fully all these years after, copying it from that paper filled with my schoolgirl flourishes. But I held off from sending it, for Rissa was different when she was under the spell of Bessie and Jane Marlin, with their heads too crammed with dresses and parties and such. She might even show my letter to those two and have a good laugh at my expense. So I hid what I had written, and tried to put it out of my mind.

There was a power of work to be done getting ready for Thanksgiving and Annie Button laid up off and on with the tooth-ache. Mother grumbled that it was plain inconsiderate of her to fall by the way when we were short handed, but though she scolded Annie, she was tireless in laying on poultices and other home remedies.

"Not that they'll help her much," she confided to me as we sat picking out nut kernels and stoning raisins for mince-meat. "She's kept her own longer'n most and she'd better go straight over to that man in Rockland that hauls teeth and get a new set fore we're frozen in. I told her so when they commenced to plague her last summer, but she dies hard, Annie does."

But Annie Button and her teeth soon became an old story to us, and we were presently absorbed by the Major's return from Boston. He came by the "Rainbow" and once more she lay at anchor just outside the Harbor. It was more than five years since I had seen her and though her sails were dingy and her paint no longer glistened in the sun, her lines were as clean

and graceful to see. She bore herself proudly, like an aging beauty, whose bones are still finely made in spite of wrinkles and fading color. She kept her air of distinction, so that one forgot the vicissitudes that had beset her, and only noted the long pointing of her prow; the height of her tapering masts, and the gracious swell of her rounded stern as she sat at her moorings. I was glad Nat was not there to see her from The Folly windows that overlooked the Narrows. She would have reminded him too keenly of those bitter months which were only lately beginning to lift from his mind.

I waited on table the night of the return, since Bo was busy bringing the Major's belongings up from shore. Henry Willis had driven over and the two men talked so intently together that they scarcely noticed me or the food I set before them.

"I hoped you'd get rid of her this time," Henry Willis said.

"There wasn't a bid fit to mention, Henry," Major Fortune told him. I thought he looked worn and tired, even with the soft, kind light of candles on his face. "You can spare your breath and your 'I told you so's. She'll be bringing in at least something of what she's cost me."

"Time she did. Tell me what plans you've got afoot for her?"

"Load her to capacity with all that lumber we've got on hand. I'm in touch with a firm in Galveston who'll take it at my figure. Here's their letter."

He pushed a paper across to his friend. I missed Henry Willis' comment by going out to get the roast. When I came back they were still at it.

"You've guaranteed that captain too much wages, Nathaniel. You'd have done better to let me dicker with him."

"He wouldn't come without an advance and a written agreement. They're a slick lot now." The Major sighed. "They all want berths on steamers or packets. You have to hunt to find a man sensible enough to stick to canvas, or too old to learn new tricks."

"Well, perhaps you did the best thing to get a better man and pay him more. How about your crew?"

"We came up short-handed. Bo filled in some and I guess we can pick up three more around here to go along now the summer season's over."

"And the insurance?" Henry Willis waited with a frown above his spectacles for the reply.

"That's another matter." The Major kept his eyes on his plate, and hedged a bit I thought. "You know the old one lapsed last night. Well, I didn't see the need of taking out another till the lumber's actually put aboard. I'm not going to insure till we see how much she can carry."

"You mean she's sitting out there now, Nathaniel, without enough to cover her in case anything happened?"

The Major fidgeted with his food.

"She's as safe here as she could be anywhere under the sun." The Major pointed out. "I can keep my eye on her right here from my own windows. It's only for ten days or so at the most. She'll need to be cleared of her fittings, but once that's done we'll begin stowing it. It'll save me a pretty penny if I wait till I can wire them exact figures. You ought to be the first one to see that, Henry?"

"I do. But suppose anything happens?"

"Nothing's going to. I've got great confidence in this new captain, and I'll wire for a new policy the minute she's ready to sail."

"Well, it's your affair, but I wouldn't take a chance like that, not for more profits than you're going to make out of the whole voyage."

The Major cleared his throat impatiently and set down his knife and fork with a great clatter.

"I need every extra dollar I can lay hands on right now," He said bitterly. "And here's a chance to pare down expenses. I must say it sounds queer to hear you urging me to pay out cash for once."

His friend reddened at this fling.

"There are times to save and times to spend," he answered

dryly. "But you and I never see them the same way. Well, I wouldn't take such a risk."

"Any risk's too much to ask you to take, you old crab in your shell!" The Major was trying to laugh him into forgetting. I could see that.

"I'll say no more then, Nathaniel." Henry Willis spoke with finality. "I've always kept clear of that vessel which I'm more thankful for every day I live. I was born cautious and you were born reckless,—that's the truth in a nutshell."

"And we can leave it at that." The Major was still trying to be jovial against the disapproval that met him across the table.

"All right, all right," Henry Willis saw there was no use going on with the subject. "Only," his forehead still puckered in the way I knew so well, "you'd do well to remember that proverb our grandmothers used to tell us,—'It only takes a small twig to poke out the eye!'"

The Major laughed, but there was no hearty ring to the sound he made.

"That's old women's talk, Henry, the kind you always did listen to. What's the 'Rainbow' and her cargo got to do with twigs poking out the eyes? Come on, I'm for a fire in the study and a glass of sherry."

I thought no more of their conversation,—not till some days later when I had reason to remember it.

November was a slack time with men in Little Prospect. Fish and lobsters were less plentiful in the nearer waters, and with the ship-yard and saw-mill idle, only odd bits of carpentry and painting remained to be done. So it was easy to set every able-bodied man to work dismantling and re-loading the "Rainbow". I had expected Jake Bullard to jump at this chance to earn some extra dollars, but when we walked from church the Sunday following he explained why he was not going to do so.

"I'm right in the middle of over-hauling that sloop I bought," he told me. "I want to have her in good shape to put up for the winter and now with everybody pressed in to work on the 'Rainbow', I'll have to manage single-handed. Besides," he half

hesitated before he went on, "Sam's got himself kind of unhinged with her in these waters again."

"You mean Cousin Sam's against your working for the Major?" I asked him.

"Yes," he admitted, "I don't mind telling you if you won't blab it round. He ain't near so twisted in his legs and back as he was, but I swear he's worse tied up in his mind and opinions."

"I know, mother and I think sometimes he acts most out of his head, specially if he gets off on Fortunes."

"Well, that's why I didn't want to get him any worse riled. He'd be sure to find out if I was working on the 'Rainbow'. He's been awful spying lately. He goes on for hours to the men at the store or the wharves 'bout how it's all on account of that blamed vessel he's dragging round the way he is. Most of 'em just humor him along, but I tell you the fits come on him bad ever since she dropped anchor here."

"She'll be off in another week," I reassured him. "The Major thinks so, if they push the work. He'll be better, I guess, once she's sailed."

"Yes." He gave a sigh as we walked on together. "But I could have used the money just the same. Still, I figure it ain't worth it to set him off worse'n he is now."

"I'll be glad, too, when she's gone," I said. "Not that I hold with what they used to say about her bringing bad luck because of what happened at the launching, only it does seem's if she'd made lots of trouble."

I was thinking of Nat and that the "Rainbow" had nearly cost him his life, but I was wise enough not to bring his name into our talk.

"I expect he'll carry on 'bout it all through dinner," he warned me as we climbed near the Jordan house. "If you try to reason him out of it, he only gets worse. I'll be good and ready to move out when the time comes. I pay regular for my board and keep and if 'twasn't for Martha being my own sister and doing for me when I was little, I'd clear out now."

"Oh, you couldn't do that yet, Jake, not when they have such

a time to get along as it is. Wait till Ruth's married and Hilda can bring in more."

"Humph! Those two!" He snorted till his breath showed blue on the sharp air. "I declare I'd sooner listen to Sam rave as to hear that pair complain all day."

I wished that mother had come along with us when I took my place at the dinner table, for as soon as Cousin Sam had mumbled a blessing, he was off.

"Pull that shade down, Martha," he commanded from his chair. "I can't swallow a mouthful with the Major's 'Bow of Promise' in plain sight. May Hell's lightning strike it to splinters."

"Oh, now, Pa, don't begin that," begged Ruth. "Will's here today and he don't come all the way over from Rockland to hear you go on 'bout Fortunes."

"It's nothing to you young ones your own father was crippled so's she could slide out nice and easy on her ways." He refused to leave the "Rainbow" even with the shade between him and her shape on the far waters. "You don't care I was half killed and no thanks for it. Throwed out on the dump-heap, like a cracked spar,—me that took the biggest risk and always done the dirty work."

"Oh, Sam, for heaven's sake, eat your dinner," Cousin Martha tried to distract him with a heaped plate of chicken and dump-lings. "No good comes of crying over spilt milk."

"Fortunes took me and broke me," he went on in shriller tones, "and you sit there and talk of spilt milk." He swallowed a large mouthful but before any of us had a chance to break in, he was off again. "It's all Fortune doing we're so hard up. I made good money when I was whole. There wasn't a smarter man in the yards and you know it."

"But, Pa, the yards have been shut down these seven years." Hilda spoke up in her pert way. "You might think of that once in awhile."

"And I spose Fortunes ain't to blame for *that*, Miss?" Red spots began to show on his sunken cheeks above the bone.

"Well, I guess he didn't want to have 'em empty and idle, did he, Kate?" Hilda was determined to make me his next target, in spite of the scowl Jake sent her across the table.

"She's a good one to ask." Cousin Sam gave a short unpleasant laugh as he looked over in my direction. "Mother and daughter, they're a pair of slaves to that family. It galls me, yes, it galls me when I think of 'em deluded and driven from morning till night up there in the Folly."

"We're not driven." I spoke up fair and square. "Fortunes have been real good to us, and—and you were the one that sent us there in the first place."

"To my everlasting shame be it said!" Cousin Sam thumped the table so hard the dishes rattled. "But you two stayed on against my warnings. When I was nigh to death I pleaded with your mother to leave. 'Carrie Fernald,' I says, says I, 'you ought to have more pride'n to stay under the same roof with the man that's dealt me a death blow and then throwed me out. You'd ought to think more of that girl of yours than to let her learn their ways from his children,—hard-hearted, proud ways that won't do her no good.' Yes, I told her the truth, but would she listen to me? She would not, for the taint had got into her blood a'ready, so she put him and his afore her own flesh and blood. That's what I've lived to see."

"Oh, leave 'em lay!" Jake broke in crossly. "Kate's got a right to eat her dinner in peace, hasn't she?"

I gave him a grateful squeeze under cover of the tablecloth. It was good of him to stand up for me like that when I knew how he disapproved of all my dealings with the Fortune family. He squeezed my fingers back with a grip that made me wince.

"Well," Cousin Sam subsided with only a few more rumblings, for he was really afraid Jake might move out if he offended him. "All I can say is, it's hard when your own family sit back and see you hurt and humbled by another man's pride. When they won't take your part against him that done it. When they even go and serve him and his." Once more he threw me a

dark, reproachful look. "But I tell you I'll get back at him yet. I'll get my chance and when I do I mean to take it!"

His words were not new to me. We had all listened to them before. But they had a queer, frightening ring that day that took away my appetite. Somehow I couldn't let them just roll off me the way the rest did,—Ruth and Will whispering and giggling together, and Hilda chattering away to her mother about the new line of goods that had just come for the store. I was more relieved than I could have told anyone when the meal was over, and Jake volunteered to sail me back.

"It's turning cold, Kate," Cousin Martha told me, "if you wait awhile I know Will would drive you back in his father's team."

But I protested that I didn't mind the wind. I preferred to be cold, rather than to stay on and listen to more talk.

Jake had hard pulling to get us out of the Harbor. As we came out into the Narrows we passed close to the "Rainbow". I was filled with all manner of memories and misgivings as I looked up at her steep, dark sides and thought how far those weathered boards had been and into what strange harbors her long prow had nosed a way. It was all so bound up with me; with Rissa, and most of all with Nat, that as we passed close I could fairly hear again the clamor of her launching, and those drumming blows whose beat I should never quite lose from the dark of my mind. Though she had been painted over many times, a faint arch of color still showed at the stern. That other rainbow was withering, too, even as those of sun and rain and air. It made me shiver and look away as if I were watching something dwindle and die.

"Haul up that shawl you brought." Jake commanded, mistaking my motion for cold. "This wind cuts, but we'll have it behind us once we're past the point and I can raise my sail. Gosh, I'm glad to get away from the house!"

"So'm I. Jake, cousin Sam's worse'n I ever saw him."

"I told you the 'Rainbow' had set him off. I kind of wish, though," he looked back at the vessel we were now past, "I'd

stood out and helped with the loading. He'll get over it once she's off and I could have made maybe as much as twenty dollars."

He hoisted the home-made sail he kept under his stern seat. I knew it well by a jagged patch that ran like a fork of lightning halfway across it. I kept the tiller steady while he got it up. After that it was easy going, with only a couple of tacks before we got round Porcupine Head and into the creek.

"That's a whale of a house to build just to stay in from June to September." He said as we looked up to the shuttered bulk of the Drakes' place. "Wonder how it would feel to have all that money?"

I started to tell him that I guessed Will Drake didn't feel much different from the rest of us and that he was real pleasant and always spoke friendly to me last summer when he came over to see Rissa. But I thought better and didn't mention it. Cousin Sam's carrying-on had made me wary of starting any subject that might turn into an argument.

"You brought us in pretty, Jake," I praised him as I stepped out by the boathouse.

"Oh, it's nothing," he laughed, pleased at my compliment. "Wait till I get something better'n this old tub to take you out in. I'm going to paint the new one black with a green trim,—this old pumpkin color don't suit me."

"I'm kind of used to it," I said, remembering the first dory that Rissa and Nat and I had learned to manage. "I even like that funny patch on your sail, same's if it was your mark on it."

"You'll know my new one next summer without no such scar," he promised. "I'm going to Rockland with Will this week. I need to get more paint and fixings. He says I can bunk with him till next Sunday."

"Then you'll be away Thanksgiving," I reminded him. I was feeling very fond of Jake that afternoon and he was in his pleasantest mood. "I'll miss you over the holiday. It's pretty lonesome up here now."

"I know how 'tis," he said, putting his arm round me in one

of his sudden hugs. "It's hard waiting, but we'll have our turn together soon's I can swing it. There'll be a party over to Trundy's Tavern in a couple of weeks. Maybe we can fix it to go, and you can stay the night with the girls. Sam's sure to be over his spell by then."

"Oh, I'd like to go," I brightened up at the thought. "I hear it's going to cost fifty cents a piece if they get someone to fiddle and play the piano."

I saw his enthusiasm wane at that.

"Well, we'll see," he added, "guess I won't be seeing you till next Sunday."

All the days following mother and I were busy with extra baking. Annie Button was still housed in the little cottage where she and George lived. He was kept on the move, too, getting chickens and turkeys ready for roasting; bringing the best ham from the smoke-house, and doing all manner of odd jobs besides his regular chores. Bo drove the Major to Little Prospect every morning and fetched him back after dark, for he was personally tending to getting the lumber aboard the "Rainbow".

"He sho' feel bad to see her cleaned of her fittings," Bo told me. "He love that boat like she were his own chile."

But once she was ready for her cargo, the Major pushed all hands to get it through before Thanksgiving. I could no longer see the "Rainbow" from the upper windows, for she had been brought in to the wharf by the saw-mill. Nearly every evening Henry Willis came back with him. He had invited the new captain and his first and second mate to eat their Thanksgiving dinner at The Folly and this put mother on her mettle.

"I'll set a spread fit for 'em to remember," she announced over her largest pots and kettles. "Sea-faring men are the ones to appreciate good food, so I'll put extra measure of shortening into my pie crust, and we'll start off with clam stew. There's nothing like clams to spur the appetite. You just remember that, Kate, when you come to cook for a parcel of men folks."

On Wednesday night supper was a good hour delayed the Major was so late returning. He looked like all-in from the

long day on board, but he was in better spirits than I had seen him in many months.

"Is it all done, Sir?" I asked him as he threw off his coat and went in to the fire. "Did you get all the lumber aboard?"

"We did," he answered with unusual heartiness. "It was a back-breaking job, but she's loaded to her limits."

As I served them their hot supper I heard more talk of their plans.

"You certainly know how to push work through," Henry Willis said. "I guess those slave drivers of ancient Egypt could have got a few points from you if they'd been around today."

"Maybe." The Major gave one of rare laughs. "But I haven't felt so fit in years. Guess I need the feel of a ship under me. It's what I've been missing of late."

"Of course," the other went on in his more precise way, "I don't doubt your judgment, Nathaniel, but I think you could have left off that last load they put aboard."

"She can carry it. I know her capacity. I guess I didn't build her for nothing."

"She sits pretty low in the water, all the same. I'm not the only one noticed that. Lots of the men spoke of it. Said they'd hate to be sailing her if she strikes bad weather off Hatteras."

"Always some that know too much." The Major poured himself another glass of wine and I noticed that his hand shook from cold, or weariness, or something else. "She couldn't be better trimmed. It's all in the stowing of a cargo, that's why I wasn't going to leave it to anyone else. Every dollar of profit counts, you know."

"Don't tell me that."

"Got the figures all straight I gave you, Henry? You'll send that wire to the insurance people right off?"

"I've sent it already from the Tavern, Nathaniel, but I told you 'twas too late to catch them before closing time. Tomorrow's Thanksgiving and they won't do business on a holiday."

"A pesky nuisance, too, but they'll get it first thing Friday

morning. Captain Rogers isn't planning to take her out till the tide's full at noon. She'll be all properly covered by then."

"Well," Henry Willis liked to get the last word on any subject. "I'll rest easier when she's clear of the Narrows without mishap. You took a chance, but I will say luck's been with you. I'd thank you for another helping of beans, Kate, they do go right to the spot."

"Mother's got the spare room ready for you," I told him. "She thought you'd be staying, long's you're here for tomorrow's dinner."

"Well, I don't mind saying I didn't relish a long ride back this cold night. It's a pity the young folks couldn't get back for Thanksgiving. I expect you miss them too?" He gave me one of his kind smiles.

"Yes, indeed," I answered, refilling both their plates. "Mother and I've been mourning over it all day. Seems dreadful quiet here without them."

"I have a letter from Rissa. First chance I've had to read it all day." The Major fished in his pocket and tore an envelope open. "Says she's going to some party or other tomorrow night. It's mostly all about a new dress she's got." He smiled as he put it away. "Nat didn't see fit to write. I hope that means he's buckling down to work. Well, I'll find that out for myself next month. I expect I'd better pick him up and have Christmas holidays together in Philadelphia."

My heart sank as I heard that. I had hoped that Nat would be home for Christmas. But it was a long journey for Rissa and I might have known the Major would want to have her by him on the day.

Thanksgiving turned out grey and chill, with an edge to the air that meant sleet or snow before long. Thin ice coated our water pitchers. The pump was so stiff and creaking with cold that mother had to get George to work it for her. Annie came over to help, with a red flannel tied round her swollen cheeks. George put on his old bearskin coat when he drove off to get

our three guests. Bo was to wait on table while I acted as go-between from pantry to kitchen. Mother was in a great flurry over her pies and the browning fowl and gravies, while the kitchen grew more hot and savory every hour.

I helped Annie set the long table with the best linen and silver and the china with gold bands. I thought a dish of polished apples would look nice in the centre, so I slipped over to the barrels stored in the old corn crib.

It was good to be free of the house and its bustle for a bit and I sped over the newly frozen ground with my cape blowing behind. Frisky leaped and ran beside me, barking and gay. From the gap by the garden I saw that the "Rainbow" was back at her moorings, but now she sat so low her hull seemed only a dark line above the water. Gulls were scattered about her stern and I knew her crew must be throwing out scraps from the galley. The four men from Little Prospect who had signed to go would be able to eat their dinners ashore and I felt sorry for the few who would be left aboard her. I picked out a fine basketful of red apples and polished them to brightness on the sleeve of my woolen dress. Wheels ground on the driveway as I came back and I saw the new captain and mates being welcomed in by the Major.

"Yes, she carries her load well," I heard Captain Rogers assure him, and they all turned to look off at the water. "I let all but four of them go ashore for the day. The cook and cabin boy and two others can look after her."

Major Fortune had brought up bottles of his best port and sherry and there was whiskey and rum in the decanters on the sideboard. It was a man's meal and I thought it seemed queer to hear only deep voices booming from the dining room.

"You done must a had second sight to cook two turkey, Mis' Fernald," Bo told mother on one of his trips to the kitchen. "They sho' made mincemeat of one and yo chicken pie ain't nebber been so well patronized befo'?"

"I like to see men eat," Mother stole a minute from her stove to peer in through the pantry door. "I believe I'll make up a

basket for 'em to take back to the vessel. They'll get plain fare soon enough."

It was past four o'clock when they finally left the table to gather for wine and cigars in the study. We were all tired and hungry as we sat down to our own meal, and the light was already beginning to dwindle into early dusk. George was in the barn and mother sent me to fetch him.

The wind came cold from the sea and the water showed steely in the failing light. I had had little time to miss young companionship till that moment, but then it came over me that Nat and Rissa and Dick Halter and even Jake were far away from me. I longed to talk to one of my own kind. Frisky who had been shut up since noon, had followed me out and was looking up at me plaintively. Poor dog, she was spoiling for a little fun, so I threw a stick for her to chase. We went round by the bleak garden and as I played with her, my eyes searched the water again.

To my surprise I saw a boat, just in the lee of Porcupine Head, and I knew it for Jake's. I could just make out the color and that odd shaped patch like no other sail. Lonesome as I was, my heart overflowed with affection for Jake. He must have got back early and was coming over to see me. But it puzzled me for he had been so particular to say he wouldn't be back before Sunday. I looked again to make sure, and though it was nearly dark I felt certain. I wondered that he would take the water route so late and he didn't seem to be heading for the inlet or making much of any progress. Presently I lost it behind the spruces, and nothing showed on the fast dimming water but the "Rainbow's" long, low shape with a speck of light at her stern. So I called Frisky and went back to the warm kitchen, more lonesome than ever now that the hope of seeing Jake had faded. I didn't speak of it to the others, knowing they liked a chance to tease me on that score.

We sat long over our belated meal. The window panes grew dark and Bo went in with sandwiches and coffee for the men to take before their departure. George lit a corn-cob pipe that

mother wouldn't have tolerated in her kitchen on any other night.

"I'll heat some bricks for you to put in the carriage," she said, "It'll be bitter driving 'em there and back. Guess they'll be calling you most any minute now. They'll want to get aboard her soon."

"I'll go harness up," he said, rising, "better be forehanded I always say."

But he was hardly out of the door when we heard him tearing back with a great halloo. Mother set down one of the best china cups she was washing so hard it broke the handle and I ran to the entry still wiping a plate.

"Get the Major, quick," he shouted, "it's afire!"

He pushed past us and made for the study. No one moved to shut the door and as we stood there the cold air brought us a far ringing of bells from the village.

"Good grief!" I heard mother cry. "He ain't gone crazy, there *is* a fire!"

"'Tain't the barn." Annie was saying as I left them.

I don't remember how I got there, but next thing I knew I was in the hall, following the men who poured out of the front door. Beyond it I could see a distant flare of orange, past Porcupine Head. There was only one thing it could be. I knew even before I heard the "Rainbow's" name on the men's lips.

"Just this minute," George was panting, "when I went out to harness up. I see a queer sort of glow and there 'twas—"

"Good God," it was the Captain or one of the men I heard beside me, "she'll go like a furnace in this wind."

"And three men and a boy to fight it," I heard another groan.

"She was all right when we left her," I knew it was the Captain speaking to the Major. "I saw to everything myself. There was only the galley stove and they had orders not to smoke."

"It's broke out amidships," some one else said, "right where it's loaded heaviest."

"Get the horses out, George!" The Major spoke for the first time in a voice that sounded like the crack of a whip.

George was off and the men only stopped to catch up their coats. I helped Henry Willis into his. He had turned dead white and was shaking so I could hardly get his arms into the sleeves.

"Will they be able to save her?" I asked him. "The men'll all be out when they hear the bell."

"No use, no use." He shook his head. "They can't handle burning beams. She's doomed already and not enough insurance out to cover a quarter of her!"

I ran to get the Major's spy-glass, but by the time I was back, the clatter of wheels told me they were gone. Only Bo and we three women were left behind.

"Come indoors, Kate," Mother pulled me back with her. "We're like to take our death out there. God Almighty knows how it could have got started."

We hurried to the upper landing and huddled together on the window seat, passing the glass from hand to hand.

"Look!" I cried when my turn came. "It's leaping up on the port side now."

"Seem that ship can't nebber shake off her bad luck," Bo whispered. "Now she's got to burn for it."

"Oh, can't they do something?" I wailed.

"She ain't got a chance," Annie was saying. "She'll burn clear to the water line at the rate she's going."

"Dear God, it don't seem right in all that sea of water!" Mother beat her hands together like a troubled child. She was crying. I felt one of her tears splash on my hand as I reached for the glass. My own eyes were dry and clear. I'd been far-sighted from a child and I know I saw more than any of us that night.

"There's boats all round her now," I told them. "I can see 'em black as bees, but they can't get close."

"I expect the heat's fierce to feel," Annie sighed. "I hope George watches out for himself and don't get afire from sparks."

"Now they're lowering a boat," I reported. I could just make out a tiny dark speck swinging from the stern.

"Better get clear while they can, poor souls," mother was saying beside me.

There was little smoke now that the fire had got greater headway. I could see plainly the flames like hungry tongues that licked along the deck and at the base of the masts in fiery frenzy. Peering at the glare through that round eye of the spy-glass, I couldn't feel as if it were real at all. It was like one of Nat's old magic-lantern slides, lighted from behind and thrown up before me as I watched. So strong was the leaping light that the distant beam of Whale Back Lighthouse was snuffed out by it, and suddenly I caught a far flashing of wings on the edge of the brightness and I knew that bewildered gulls must have come over from Bird Rocks, believing it to be morning.

Bo opened the window and hung out. The church bell that had pealed so wildly had stopped, but every now and again we could catch a faint crackling or the hiss of blazin' wood falling into water.

"There go the masts!" I cried, as the two middle ones swayed in their orange wrappings and toppled over the farther side. They seemed not to be masts in that moment, more like the flaming branches of some gigantic scarlet maples flung to the darkness. It was all clear, as if I could have warmed my hands at the blaze, though they were numb with cold on the metal case of the glass.

When I could think of anything beside the flaring scene before me, I thought of Nat. I wondered how he would have felt to see her going up in smoke and flame. It seemed as if he must know what was happening to those fast disappearing beams that had once been his hateful world. Yet I knew he was probably playing at the piano somewhere, or laughing with other young people, even as Rissa must be at that very moment.

After the masts went the fire burned no less steadily, but in a more confined space. It was eating through the whole vessel now. She had become a deep well of fire from which sparks mounted and blew away to sea. The clustered boats dared not venture near her now for the heat and blazing beams.

"Well," mother's voice was lifted once more, "there's one person won't grieve to see the last of her, and that's Sam Jordan.

I guess he's doing some private jubilating of his own tonight."

I set the glass down on the sill. My hands had suddenly begun to shake so I couldn't keep it steady.

"Cousin Sam," I echoed her, "why he was carrying on about her only last Sunday."

"It don't surprise me. He's kept that up ever since the launching. Well, he'll have to admit this pays up any old scores he's harbored."

"What I can't make out," Annie's deafness always made her sound the more emphatic, "is who could of done it? A ship don't set itself afire."

My head felt dizzy and hot. I pressed my forehead to the cold pane of window glass to try and collect my wits. Their words set me recollecting what I hadn't given a thought to in all the commotion. I had seen Jake's boat off shore just on the heels of darkness. I knew I had, and Jake wouldn't have been out except to come and see me. Besides he must be in Rockland, the way he'd said. If only I didn't remember last Sunday's dinner so well. I kept trying to put Cousin Sam's last ugly words out of my mind. But there they were, pounding at my temples like little hammers:—"I tell you I'll get back at him yet. I'll get my chance someday and when I do, I mean to take it." I remembered the queer look in his eyes. They had been too bright, almost as if those far flares were behind them.

I longed to fling myself crying on mother and tell her what was troubling me. But how could I give words to such dreadful things? How could I bring Jake and his boat into this calamity. How could I be sure of what I hoped against hope might not be true?

We went back to the kitchen at last and made strong coffee and kept up the fires against the men's return. The "Rainbow" still burned though the flames were less high and vehement, and the clock struck midnight as we waited. Bo and Annie dozed in their chairs, but mother and I never closed our eyes.

"You'd ought to go to bed, Kate," she said. "You look all beat

out. It's been a hard day and we were up with the sun. You'll be good for nothing tomorrow without you get some sleep."

"I couldn't sleep, mother. It's got me broad awake seeing her burn up, after we were at her launching and all."

"I know, it's shaken me considerable, too." Mother sighed. "I guess it'll most break the Major's heart to lose her,—his last vessel, too."

"And it's a dead loss—pretty near," I blurted out. "He and Henry Willis were talking at the table last night. They were renewing her insurance tomorrow. He was holding her sailing for that."

"Dear God, Kate," Mother gave such a start she nearly fell out of her chair. "You don't tell me it's bad as that."

She went on to question me and I told her what they had said.

"Well, we won't let on we know it," she decided. "He'll need food and drink and a fire when he gets back more'n he ever did in his life before."

The east was beginning to brighten when we heard the horses clatter on the wooden bridge. We were all afraid to go into the hall and meet them except Bo, who carried out coffee and food. George came when he had rubbed the horses down and given them some oats. He looked grey and blear-eyed as he slumped down by the stove. I didn't say a word, but stood listening like a stone. He had no explanations to give. There had been too much excitement to get at the bottom of the matter. All he could tell us was that the cook and the boy and the two sailors hadn't noticed anything amiss till someone smelled smoke and they heard a faint crackling below.

"The galley fire was well banked," he said, "so that wasn't the trouble. Anyhow it broke out amidships and was going so hard by the time they found it, none of 'em can say rightly what done it. Must of started in the starboard side, 'bout where the ladder's swung to climb aboard. 'Twas left so for the men to come back for the night. Nobody else had left or come aboard since morning, and they made regular rounds every hour."

"Do they think 'twas set, George?" Mother questioned.

"Well," he shifted in his chair, "seems as if it must of been. Everybody's asking everybody else down there, but nobody's seen or heard a thing. Thanksgiving Day every man that could be was home with his family. Nobody remembers seeing a single boat put out but the 'Rainbow's' dinghy and that was still tied to wharf when we got there."

"How's the Major taking it?"

"Same's if he was a block of wood. Not a word out of him, but he looks bad, real bad. If you ask me he'll never be the same man he was, not after this night's work."

CHAPTER XIII

MOTHER didn't rouse me next day and I slept till noon. I woke to feel a strange dread, though I hoped for some reassurance to lay my fears. But in the kitchen I was met with new worries. Mother stood over the stove stirring mustard and water and George had been sent for Dr. Robbins.

"The Major's taken with chills and fever," she told me. "Bo and Henry Willis heard him commence to thrash and groan after they'd got him to bed. I knew 'twould end this way when I see him come back. Lord, I hope it don't run into pneumonia, but I'm fearful it's bound to."

"Any more news about the 'Rainbow'?"

"Not yet. He made Henry Willis drive down with Bo. They mean to tow what's left of her in shore. She's burned out to the water line and still smouldering. They'll send for someone to investigate, but between you 'n' me, they'll never get to the bottom of it. What worries me now's the Major. I don't like his looks and I'll be thankful when the Doctor gets here."

When he had made his visit to the sick-room, he agreed with mother.

"We've got a very sick man up there, Mrs. Fernald," he told her. "Beside the chill and exposure he had a bad shock last night. I don't know if you and Bo can manage him between you."

"We can do it, spelling each other off. I guess Henry Willis will stay too and take his turn. It's not pneumonia yet, is it, Doctor?"

"I'm trying to stave that off. It's pleurisy now, but you know how that can run into the other, and that malaria he got years

ago in Libby Prison isn't any help. Here's the medicine to give him. Keep up the mustard plasters. I'll be up again tonight if George can fetch me."

That was on Friday and by Saturday night we all knew without the Doctor's words, that the Major had gone from bad to worse.

"He burns hotter'n if that fire was right inside him," mother said with a headshake when she came down from the sickroom. "And I don't like the sound he makes when he coughs."

"How'd he rest last night?" Annie had come over for news.

"Bo says he just thrashed and muttered, and muttered and thrashed. He's quieter now but he don't act just right in his head to me."

"Are they going to send for Rissa and Nat?" I asked.

"I say as they'd ought to," Mother went on. "But he told Henry Willis he didn't want they should be scared. He promised he wouldn't the Major seemed so set on it. He did telegraph 'em on his own that their father was pretty sick."

"George says that Captain's giving all the men that was ever aboard the 'Rainbow' a regular overhauling." Annie told us. "But they're all accounted for and the vessel's so charred they'll never find a thing to give 'em a hint."

"They've sent for one of these detectives from Boston, but he won't be able to ferret it out, I guess. Maybe 'twould be different if the Major'd been up and about. Well, there, now, it's gone up in smoke and what's the good of so much talk?"

"It's a life-imprisonment offense if setting it's proved against anyone," George announced from the door as he came in to fill the woodbox.

"So it should be!" exclaimed mother. "To set a fire like that's a wanton, wicked thing to do, next to murder in cold blood!"

I was glad none of them happened to glance my way as I listened with guilty, lowered eyes, full of the secret I had kept for two long days and nights. "A life imprisonment offense", my mind kept repeating all that day as I went about my work with fingers that moved from habit in familiar tasks. Annie

helped some, but most of mother's share fell on me. I had to keep great kettles of water on the boil in readiness for any call from upstairs. Henry Willis looked very sober when I brought him a tray at noon.

"You don't think he's much worse, do you?" I asked, lingering by him. "Not so bad he might die?"

"He's been dealt a death blow, Kate," he answered gravely. "Nobody can say whether he'll rally from it or not."

"But you don't think he was fonder of the 'Rainbow' than Nat and Rissa?" I persisted. "He couldn't love anything in the world like Rissa."

"You're right." He put down his knife and fork and looked at me keenly through his glasses. His eyes were anxious, besides being blood-shot from lack of sleep. "Do you think I ought to go against him and send for her?"

"Yes," I said with sudden conviction. "She'd make him get well if anyone can!"

"Then I will," he looked at me in a relieved sort of way. "George shall take a telegram when he goes for the Doctor. You've got good sense, Kate Fernald, for all you're so young. I guess maybe women see straighter than men do in times of stress."

"She's his own," I said, standing my ground. "Nat is, too, but not the same way. How long before she can get here?"

"If she starts right off and takes a night train to Boston, she could just make the Packet tomorrow morning. That would mean another day and night. She could get here Monday noon. Here,—" he scribbled a message on a bit of paper and handed it to me, "tell George to get that right off."

I felt easier after that and I counted the hours before she could be on the doorstep.

"And Nat'll come too," I told myself as I went about my work. "He'll join her when she gets to Boston. No, he'd never let her come all that way."

I couldn't but feel a little ashamed to be so joyful at that

thought in such an anxious time. Still, it was like the spark of Whale Back Light in darkness and need to me.

That night Dr. Robbins did not go back to Little Prospect. He stayed by the Major's bed using all his skill against what none of us could bring ourselves to name. Only Bo dared speak of it to me when he came down for a bite in the kitchen while mother spelled him off in the sickroom.

"I seen ole man Death this afternoon," he told me with rolling eyes. "Ye-es, M'am, I see him skulkin' round the laylock bushes. But they cain't hide him now with all the leaves off."

"Oh, Bo," I was shocked at such talk, yet I couldn't but urge him on. "You didn't really,—it's just because you're worried, same's we all are. Death isn't a person,—it's just something that happens."

"No, Missy, he's a ole, ole man. My mammy's mammy tolle me so when I'se a li'l boy way down south 'fore Vicksburg. I wouldn't listen to her then, but I know she's right now, 'cause I see him plain today. If'n I'd been out there I'd throwed a stone to scare him off. You got to take a big stone an' aim at him an' say over yo' lef' shoulder:—'Git away from here, Ole Man Death, we don' want none o' your likes!' That'd fix him, but he slide off like a shadow."

"That's all you saw, Bo," I insisted, relieved to catch at the word, "just a shadow from a tree, or—or something."

"You act jes' the way I done when I was young, Missy Kate, an' my ole mammy's mammy tolle me the same. But you watch how you open these do's round here. He's outside, an' he's waitin' his time. Yo' li'l dog see him. I hear her whine-like. She know better'n to put her nose out 'twill he's gone."

I didn't tell him Frisky had stuck closer than a burr to me all day; that I had had to push her out on the doorstep. Common sense told me that Bo was just lapsing into a lot of his old notions that we didn't hold with in the State of Maine. Yet I couldn't bring myself to look farther than the lighted kitchen, and I did without the potatoes I needed rather than go down cellar after them.

Mother must have heard some of his talk, for she looked cross when she came down.

"It's plain disgraceful to hear that gibberish of his," she burst out to me. "Don't you listen to him, Kate, he's stuffed full of nonsense. Still, I don't know how we'd get on without him. Sometimes it takes three of us to hold the Major down in bed and with that pain in his side fit to break him in two."

"Can't the Doctor give him something to make him sleep?"

"He has now, but he's fearful to overdose him with his lungs filling up. It gives me goose-flesh to hear him holler out orders to the men he thinks are loading up the 'Rainbow'. 'Get on with the work, can't you?' He keeps saying. 'I'll show you!' And then he'll start up in bed, strong's ten men. He's got muscles of iron for one his age. He calls for Rissa, too, till it's pitiful to hear him. 'Be happy,' he said just now, thinking she was beside him, 'I never was,' he says, 'and she never was, so you must be while you can for the both of us.' It's funny he don't call for Nat, but you know how he always set store by the girl."

"I know," I said, and rammed more wood into the stove.

Next morning he was still alive, though weaker. Dr. Robbins thought there wouldn't be any crisis till night or even next day. He went back to the village after breakfast, promising to return later. Mother made me put on my best and drive down with them to church.

"You tell everyone he's holding his own, and that's all we can say," she charged me. "I guess Jake'll walk back with you, and it'll do you good to get a breath of fresh air you've been cooped up so long. No, I want you should go. Henry Willis will stay, so I won't need you for a spell."

That ride in the early, nimble air put heart into me again. It was cold, but the wind blew less sharp, and the sun caught the peak of every far wave and turned spruce needles and the resin on topmost cones to quicksilver. I thought that even Bo must admit such brightness was enough to scare Death himself away. It seemed too fair and glittering a world to take leave of. Yes, I thought, it would be hard to die on such a morning. But I

could not speak my thoughts to George or old Dr. Robbins. I sat between their two bundled figures and the horses tossed their heads and acted almost like young colts again all the way in. I made George let me down half a mile or so from the church, where the road to the Doctor's branched. I was glad to stretch my legs after the days indoors.

That made me a little late and I could hear them beginning the Doxology when I neared the old graveyard. The words came clearly to me:

*"Praise God from whom all blessings flo—o—w.
Praise Him all creatures here be—lo—w.
Praise Him above ye heavenly host—
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Gh—ost."*

The men's voices sounded so strong and deep, almost like the roar of pine and spruce boughs in a high wind. And yet, it came to me there in the sunshine outside, that they all must die. All those hearty voices would be still someday. It shook me to think of it, remembering the Major on his great bed in The Folly. I reached out a hand and laid it impulsively on one of the nearer gravestones. It was all canted over and thick with lichen, rough to my touch. Something moved me to stop and read the letters that had been cut there.

"Sacred to the memory of Hannah, faithful consort of Jonathan Somes, who departed this mortal life on ye 12th day of October 1798, in ye 29th year of her age. She lived greatly beloved and died equally lamented."

"By their fruits ye shall know them."

It was a common enough inscription, but that day it laid a queer hold on me. Hannah Somes hadn't been much above ten years older than I was and she had had to die. She couldn't have wanted to, not if she liked being a faithful wife and a mother, too, for I had seen another, smaller stone beside hers. "She lived

greatly beloved and died equally lamented", the words kept going round and round in my head long after I was settled in the Fortune pew with my eyes raised to the pulpit. But I wasn't thinking of her so much as of myself when I said them over. "Greatly beloved—equally lamented", would that ever be said of me, I wondered, and could one ever know afterwards?

Reverend Chase was praying for the Major.

"O Lord God of Hosts," he was saying with all his fervor, "we pray Thee for Thy Servant now lying in the shadow of death. Keep him in Thy care through his suffering, remembering his good works and that he has bowed his head to Thee here in this Thy Tabernacle. If it be Thy will restore him to health and prosperity, but if it be otherwise, lead him to eternal peace and rest. Amen."

But I couldn't make his petitions fit with Major Fortune. I doubted he could ever act like anyone's servant, even the Lord God of Hosts, and as for peace and rest, it seemed to me as if he'd never take to them naturally. I'd heard George tell of seeing men buried at sea, sewed into sailcloth with weights at their ankles, and I thought if the Major had to die he'd prefer to go down to restless waters from one of his own vessels.

When the sermon began I was able to make Jake out at the farther side of the church. That gave me a feeling of comfort and friendliness, and when our eyes met I tried to let him know that I craved to see him after service. He looked so solid and strong I felt I could tell him what had been troubling me since Thursday night. Perhaps he'd be able to reassure me about his boat; tell me he'd had it with him, or explain that I'd been mistaken in seeing it.

They crowded round me in the aisle after the last amen. Everyone wanted news of the Major, even Reverend Chase came down from his high place to inquire. I had to say over and over,—"He's holding his own, that's all," the way mother had told me to. Lots of them offered to drive me back, but I thanked them kindly and said no, I wanted to walk and there was nothing anyone could do up at The Folly. Jake waited patiently,

sitting on a tombstone in his blue coat. At last I was free to join him.

We said nothing beyond an everyday greeting till we had left the village and were on the long stretch back. Then I reached for his hand and pressed it and started to cry a little.

"Why, Kate," he said kindly, though puzzled, "what's the matter? You're not crying over the Major, are you?"

"No," I told him, welcoming his warm clasp, "only it's been awful up at The Folly, and so much has happened in one short week it scares me."

"Plenty's happened and no mistake," he agreed. "Just my luck to be off when something worth while like a big fire comes along."

"Oh, Jake," I quavered, "you did go after all. I kind of hoped maybe you didn't."

"'Course I went, same's I told you. Just got back last night with Will, or I'd of been up before now. What ails you anyway, you're all of the shivers!"

"I've got to tell you something." I stopped short and faced him at the edge of the first wood piece. "Only first you've got to promise me not to tell a soul."

I guess I must have frightened him, for his freckles showed out plain against his face, and he didn't bother to push the fore-lock out of his eyes.

"Is it 'bout us?" His hand gripped my arm till it hurt.

"Well, yes, kind of, only we didn't have anything to do with it. Promise me, Jake, I've been most crazy, for I couldn't say a word to anyone else."

He looked mollified and I got his word.

"Have you seen your boat yet?" I asked him. "The old one I mean, not the new sloop you're fixing. Tell me that first of all?"

"Why, yes, I rowed out in her 'fore church this morning. I wanted to have a look at the burned hulk they towed over to Saw-Mill Cove. But what's that got to do with what you're spoiling to tell me?"

"And was it all right?" I persisted. "You didn't find anything

amiss?" He looked at me queerly, so I pressed him again. "Was it same's you left it, Jake?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, it wasn't." He spoke slowly. "I left the sail all neat and rolled under the stern seat and two good pair of row-locks, though I've only got one set of oars. This morning she was there in the boathouse where I keep her and the padlock hadn't been broken, but one row-lock's missing and the sail rolled kind of different. Been bothering me all through church, but how you come to know is past me."

It wasn't three minutes before he had the whole story out of me.

"You're sure?" He kept asking. "You're certain sure 'twas my boat?"

"I don't see how I could have made any mistake," I told him as we went on with our heads close together. "It was most dark, but I could see that patch plain's anything. You see, I hoped maybe you hadn't gone to Rockland after all and were coming over to see me."

He looked pleased before he went on with his questions.

"And how long after that did the fire break out?"

"I don't remember exactly, not more than an hour I guess. But it was pitch dark when we saw it. I didn't think till mother mentioned Cousin Sam and then it came over me all of a sudden how he'd talked last Sunday, and I got putting two and two together. Oh, I wish I could know for sure he didn't do it!"

"Well, I guess he could have," Jake spoke with conviction and more concern than I had ever seen in him. "He knows where I keep the key to the padlock. He ain't so crippled but what he could get down there and take her out. He's just enough off in his head to do it."

"But Cousin Martha'd have been sure to see him go, Jake. They'd have missed him if he was off a couple of hours."

"It kind of comes back to me now Hilda saying they all went over to Stanley's after dinner. They was over there when the bells commenced ringing. Sam wouldn't go; said he didn't feel so good after dinner. Yes, I'm sure of that 'cause she said

Martha run back to the house to tell him the news. She met him on the doorstep and he was bound to go down to the shore with the rest, only she persuaded him against it. She was fearful he'd get hurt in the crowd or start carrying on."

"Oh, Jake, it does look bad. But George says nobody saw a boat out all afternoon. Seems as if someone else must have seen it if I did?"

"Not if they was all home and away from shore. He could keep her close to the ledges and kind of shy by without notice, specially if 'twas so near dark. You've got awful sharp eyes, Kate, you can see farther'n I can in a fog."

"Oh, dear, I wish I was as near sighted as old Miss Blodgett," I sighed, "and I wouldn't be so tormented now."

"He took an awful chance, but he was lucky. Most likely he hung round behind Porcupine till he could count on the darkness. He'd know enough 'bout vessels to guess when the watch would make rounds. He could of crept up by that ladder without their hearing a thing."

"But he'd have had to climb up it. I don't see how he could, lame as he is."

"He's spryer'n you'd think when he's got his mind set. There's a keg of kerosene in the boathouse. I bet he swabbed rags in it and stuffed 'em in someway. Yes, I can see how 'twould of been easy. Plenty of time for him to get the boat in and himself back 'fore it got headway."

"Oh, Jake," I cried out, "what are we going to do?"

"Do?" He echoed, and his voice grew firm and harsh. "Why keep still same's you have. You don't want to land us in jail, do you?"

"Us!" I stared at him aghast.

"Sure, it was my boat, wasn't it? Even if I was away they could hold me responsible,—party to the crime, that's what they call it in the papers."

I trembled and drew closer.

"It would be bad enough if they sent Cousin Sam away, and

George says it's life imprisonment for starting a fire in the State of Maine."

"So it is, and Sam's talked so mean it wouldn't take much more'n your word to send him there,—me, too, maybe. Good thing you've got a close mouth, Kate, and had sense enough to keep still."

"But, Jake, it's terrible, knowing a thing like that. It's too much for me to keep it all alone."

"Well, you've told me haven't you?"

"Yes, only it seems as if we ought to let someone else decide what to do."

"They'll decide all right." He gave a hard laugh. "If you tell, it'll go hard with him and me. I'd be finished for the rest of my life. So go ahead and blab, I can't stop you!"

That sounded so grim that I broke out crying afresh.

"Oh, Jake," I sobbed, "don't say things like that. I'm only trying to do the best I can. I've kept it to myself all this time. I couldn't sleep for the way it plagued me, but I didn't even tell mother."

"Well, then, go on keeping it." He knew he was safe, but he went on reasoning me into silence. "Tisn't as if you could do any earthly good by telling. The 'Rainbow's' gone. She wasn't insured, so he couldn't collect no matter what you said. If the Major lives he won't get the money, and if he dies, it won't matter to him. All you'd do would be to send Sam Jordan to jail or the insane asylum. Martha'd die of the disgrace, and if I did get off free I'd have the lot of 'em to look after long's they lived. Then where'd our plans come in? You better stop worrying and just think of that."

"Oh, I do,—I mean, I will, only—"

"You quit your everlasting onlys and buts and maybe-I-oughts. I tell you it's the only way for us all now the harm's done."

And so we agreed to leave it as we came in sight of The Folly. He reasoned right in a way. I knew I could do more harm than good by telling. Yet it was too great and secret a

burden for a young one like me to carry. It was the first time I had to shoulder real responsibilities; the first time my loyalties were divided. I was torn between keeping faith with Fortunes and with Fernalds. That time the Fernald side won, and Jake went off with words of affection that eased my heart, though not my puzzled mind.

That night the Major quieted down, but more because his strength was ebbing than because the sickness had lessened. Dr. Robbins never left the bedside and sat plying him with whisky and medicines. His vigor was amazing, and the Doctor clung to that as his only hope. The crisis was still to come and now the message had reached us that Nat and Rissa were on the way we all prayed it might be staved off till they arrived. Long before the Packet was sighted off the Narrows George had driven down to be waiting at the wharf. It seemed to me that morning was hours long. I even went in to the east parlor to see if that clock were faster than the kitchen time-piece. The Major always wound the French enamel clock every Saturday night and for a moment I feared it might have run down, but the little woods-men came out and went through their sawing precisely at eleven. I felt a curious dread of having it stop. It would be a bad sign with the Major between life and death upstairs. So, rather timidly, I found the squat gilt key on the shelf and wound it as I was to do so many times afterward.

We heard the Packet give her deep whistle long before we saw her smoke above the trees. I tip-toed upstairs to whisper it to Henry Willis who gave me a relieved nod. Then I waited on the window seat behind the damask curtains for the first clatter of wheels on the wooden bridge. It was strange to be straining my eyes as I had in that same place all those years before for the sight of horses and a carriage through the gap. But there I was, grown up, and no longer dreading the Major and his temper.

I ran out bare-headed to meet them as the horses drew up, steaming, at the door. Nat was out almost before they stopped

and Rissa caught his hand and was down in a swish of silk and fur and blue broadcloth.

"Hello, Kate," Nat turned to me with a subdued smile.

But before I could greet them Rissa was full of questions.

"Kate, he isn't,—he hasn't yet—George said he was pretty low when he left and we were afraid maybe we wouldn't get here in time?"

"He's still hanging on," I told them, "you go right up. Here, I'll take your things."

I could feel how cold Rissa's hands were as I took her muff and coat and her little feathered blue hat. Yet she didn't flinch or tremble. She was pale from her long journey and dark under her eyes. But her lips were set firm and even in her young beauty she looked like the Major. Nat showed his feelings more. He kept wetting his lips anxiously and it seemed to me he hung back as if he dreaded to go upstairs.

"It's all right," I whispered to him, "he's clear in his head now. Day before yesterday was when he was off. Oh, Nat, I'm so glad you've come."

He pressed my hand and smiled faintly at me.

"I'll be down soon, Kate," he said, "you wait."

Rissa stayed up there, but after awhile he returned. We went in to the east parlor and he made for the piano at once. But he had no sooner opened the case when he shut it again.

"Better not," he said, "I don't want to upset him. Let's make a fire I'm half frozen."

He lit the one I had laid and we crouched before it on the hearth-rug in spite of our long legs. I searched his face for change and found it there. He looked all of five years older than when he had left barely two months before. It was partly the long, troubled journey, but I could see a difference in his eyes, and a more sure set to his full lips.

"Oh, Nat," I said, "I was sure you'd come, too, but it seemed you'd never get here."

"It's queer, isn't it," he reached out and took my hand as if we were frightened children comforted by one another's pres-

ence, "to have him the one up there sick. He's so weak and quiet it doesn't seem as if it can be father."

"They thought he might die last night," I told him, "but I couldn't believe he would. I thought he'd hang on till Rissa got here, and—and you, too," I added as an afterthought.

"He only wants her with him now," Nat spoke without bitterness, almost as if it did not concern him at all. "I wish," he hesitated, and then went on as if he had read my mind. "I wish it could matter more to me. It ought to. He's my father and I ought to care terribly about his getting well. But I don't seem to—" his voice dropped to a whisper and he twisted the top button of his coat with restless fingers. "I've tried to feel that way about him ever since we got the word, but I can't seem to make it matter one way or the other."

"I guess you're too tired to feel much of anything," I tried to comfort him.

"No," he shook his dark head with the thick, tumbled hair, "it isn't that. I could feel everything else all the way here. The sun was so bright on the spruce needles and there were red berries by the swamp that went right through me like a pain. You see, it's different."

"Well, feelings are feelings," I said, "and you can't call them out any more than you can the tide, or a fog if the wind's northwest."

"It's queer, too," he still whispered, "feeling that I needn't be afraid of him anymore. It's as if,—as if he was gone already." He leaned closer and searched my face for sign of disapproval. "I wouldn't have told anyone but you. I'm so ashamed not to have the right feelings about him. You don't think I'm wicked not to, do you?"

"No, Nat," I said real low, but with conviction, "you can't be any different from what you are. I guess I don't feel as bad as I ought to about him either, except I don't want anybody to go and die."

"Oh, neither do I."

"People can do things to you when you're little," I found my-

self trying to tell him how I felt. "Can hurt you, I mean, and it's like marking the bark of a tree. It may not kill it, only it shows up more the bigger the tree gets. Anyhow, it never goes away."

"That's so," he gave me one of his sudden smiles that was like sun through a fog bank. "I knew you wouldn't be hard on me. That's why I told you and I feel better for it. You see, being away from here I've had a chance to think things out for myself and I know now he'll never be able to hurt me again."

"Oh, Nat, I'm glad. It's good to hear you say that and it's good to have you back. I've missed you so bad these two months I couldn't rightly let myself think of it till now."

"I meant to write to you, Kate," he apologized. "I did honestly mean to."

"That's all right, you had plenty else on your mind. It doesn't matter, I guess, putting words on paper long's I can count on you and you can on me."

We heard Rissa on the stairs just then and Nat started up to bring her in to the fire. I rose, too, suddenly dreading to have her find me sprawled on the hearth rug. She was shivering as she came in. The fire glowed rosy between her outspread fingers and turned the curling ends of her hair to gold.

"He's still pretty low," she told us, "but he sets store by having us back. He didn't want me out of his sight now, only the Doctor made me come down for a bite."

"I'll go bring you something to have right here by the fire." I started towards the kitchen remembering my duties. "They think he'll pull through, don't they, now you've got here?"

"Dr. Robbins says he's got a chance." She leaned her head back against the mantel and her lovely long throat showed white above the collar of her blue dress. "That's all anybody knows."

I left them together and hurried off to the kitchen I had forgotten.

CHAPTER XIV

WHETHER it was Rissa who was responsible, or his own enduring strength, the Major did not die. He struggled back to health by inches, but to me he was always like the great hulk of some abandoned ship, left to rot at a forgotten wharf. No, he was never the same again. Something I couldn't rightly name had gone out of him forever. All that month of December he kept Rissa near him. She could scarcely leave his room or the study where he sat by the fire as soon as he could crawl down stairs. She grew wan, being so much indoors, but she humored him as the Doctor had told her she must. Nat only stayed till his father was out of danger, but he promised to be back for Christmas and Rissa and I counted the days till his return.

I was almost as confined as she with the extra work to be done. Still, we had our moments together when the Major slept or had long conferences with Henry Willis who had now moved to The Folly for good and all. Once more Rissa and I were thrown back upon our own society. Being young and lonely in a household of age, we turned to one another for companionship. I know well now that otherwise we two would not have been drawn together. We were made of such differing stuff. But youth was running high in us and we had our own early years to turn back upon. Rissa was never what could be called close to me, yet we made the most of what we had in common, which was Nat. He meant the world to us in varying ways. I tried to forget the hurt she had given me at the time of the reception. It was mostly the fault of her Aunt and those cousins I told myself, and I mustn't blame her for that. But she had too

much of the Major in her for me to feel quite at ease now we were grown.

When it was mail time in the late afternoons she would slip out to the kitchen or call me up to her room. Then the Major would be going over his letters with Henry Willis and if she happened to have one from Dick Halter or Nat she would read out bits to me. Often as the winter dusk set in early over the islands and sea we would grow confidential sitting in the dimness together before it was time to light the lamps and make ready for supper. It was during one of these little snatches of leisure that we talked of our plans for the future.

"Your mother the same as told me that you and Jake Bullard are going to be married, Kate," Rissa began. "Is that true?"

"Why, yes," It was the first time I had ever said so right out to anyone and I felt confused. "It's not the way it is with you and your cousins, though, we can't talk about getting married yet. He's too poor and he has his way to make. We're just sort of keeping company."

"But that's the same as being engaged," she pointed out. "At least it is if he's proposed to you and I suppose he has?"

I flushed under cover of the darkness.

"Well, kind of," I admitted. "Jake isn't much of a hand to talk, he's off alone with the fish and clams so much. He can talk when he's a mind to though."

"There's lots more than words to getting married." Rissa spoke shrewdly with such an air of wisdom that I felt very humble and ignorant beside her. "Do you love each other very much?"

"I've known him almost always," I told her, "and he's been ever so good to me and to mother. Sometimes it sort of bothers me," (I was thinking of those parts in "The Song of Solomon" and things in love stories I had read,) "to know my own feelings, let alone his."

"Aunt Esther's always telling us not to be too finicky about how we feel," Rissa tried to be reassuring. "She says you can't really know till you're married and then it's either all right or

you just have to make the best of it. That's why she says it's so important to make sure you marry a man who'll give you plenty of money and comforts. At least you'll have that to fall back on, she always says."

"That doesn't matter so much for me as it does for you," I said. "I was raised to work and mother keeps telling me I mustn't get notions. Of course Jake's full of ideas for making money. You'd be surprised to hear how he's got it all worked out."

"What kind of ideas?"

"Oh, well, he means to work the summer people for all he can and lay up a lot, and buy land and a big house when he can—" I broke off remembering his remarks about The Folly. "He's made up his mind to be a big man in Little Prospect someday. But I expect it's mostly all in his head."

"Well, you know he might be. Father says everything's so topsy-turvy nowadays you can't tell who'll land on top in a few years. He says money's getting into queer hands all the time. I think," she went on after a faint sigh, "I think he feels it's going out of his so fast he's frightened."

"Yes," I found myself daring to mention the recent disaster, "He does kind of brood over the 'Rainbow' and the insurance he didn't have on her."

"He won't even mention her name to me, hardly to Henry Willis, even," Rissa was thoughtful a moment before she went on. "But it isn't just that. There's more beside that worries him. He won't talk to me, but I can make out from things those two let slip that he's troubled about notes he gave for the ship-yard and some other property. They always hush up when I come in, but I heard enough."

"Oh, dear." The words loan and note were like a knell in my ears from the horror mother had of such things.

"And he bothers Nat about spending money. He's generous with me, but he keeps telling Nat to cut down and how he'll have to get right out and make money once he's through college. We don't dare let him find out about the music lessons."

"You mean Nat's taking some extra?" I was so glad to hear that I forgot to feel hurt at not having been let into the secret before.

"Well, he is," Rissa confided, her voice sunk to a whisper. "He wrote me as soon as he got there he wanted to, only father kept him pretty short. There's a man in Cambridge who knows a lot about piano and violin and Nat needs to learn more. So I sent him most all father'd given me for new dresses. I can make what I've got do and Jane helped me fix over some. I didn't let them know the reason, but I don't mind telling you."

"You know I'll never breathe it. Go on, tell me some more."

"He goes to his other classes just the same, but all his free time this man teaches him and lets him practice at his house. He's learning lots,—there's something called harmony, too. I don't pretend to understand it. Well, you know how father'd act if he ever got wind of it."

"Oh, I do. Will he play the piano for a living, Rissa, or the organ in church maybe?"

"Mercy, no, he wants to learn to compose pieces,—like Chopin, you know."

"Oh, Rissa," I couldn't go on I felt almost suffocated by the magnificence of that.

"Well, he could, just as well and better than most!" She mistook my awe for doubt. "Nat can beat anyone at music, the only trouble is, he's answerable to father till he's twenty-one and that's most three years off. He'd leave college now if he had his way and go off to join Dick Halter in Paris. I don't know how it's ever going to be managed, but it's got to be, no matter what I do to get the money."

Her voice was so full of determination it might have been the Major's except for its higher pitch. I peered at her slim paleness in the darkening window seat.

"It's not fair of father to thwart him," she went on with a growing hardness in her words that disturbed me. "He's got no right to say what Nat's to do or not to do. He's always been so hard on him, you know he has."

"Yes," I couldn't deny that, "he has. Still, I suppose he can't help it that he loves you the best."

"Maybe he can't, but he needn't keep Nat on such a short rein. He came near killing him on that voyage and I'll never forgive him for it or feel the same to him as long as I live."

"Oh, Rissa," I begged, "don't say such things when he was all but dead last month."

"I can't help it if he was. I came back when he wanted me, and I'm doing all I can, but I don't forget and I won't till Nat's free of him. I just wish I were twenty-one so I could do something."

"Why, what could you do then?"

"Lots of things," she spoke mysteriously. "I could sell my parcel of land for one thing. It's in my name. He showed me the deed once in his safe. It comes to me once I'm of age."

"You never told me. Which piece is it?"

"About forty acres over by Squaw Cove on the shore and then it runs back along the other side of the Creek, past where the ruined mill is."

"That Old Lady Phibben lives in?" I was suddenly reminded of my fall visit and might have told her more of it except for her news.

"Yes," she went on, "he told me he wanted it to be mine, so I'd be all fixed with property in my name when I get married. I guess it would bring a good price, shore front and all, for those woods have never been cut."

"He'd never let you!"

"Maybe not," she broke off with a shrug, "and don't you say a word about it to anyone."

"Of course not, Rissa, I never do, only maybe things'll be better by then."

"Well, I hope so, but father wants me to marry someone important soon."

"There's Dick Halter, he's going to be important someday."

"Someday isn't here and now. Aunt Esther says Paris is full of people living in garrets who think they're wonderful artists.

Anyhow father means important with money or an old shipping family. He'd let Nat work himself to the bone before he'd give him his way."

"He is dreadful set, but you know, Rissa, I get sorry for him, kind of, lately. I think he feels Nat's going to break loose from him pretty soon and that's why he's taking a tighter grip."

"Nat's going to do what he wants to." The room was wholly dark now and her voice came out of it fine and sharp as a needle. "It doesn't matter about you or me or father or anyone so long he does."

"I want him to, and I think he will. Don't you remember what Old Lady Phibben said that time about his holding out his hands in glory someday?"

"That crazy old thing! Mercy, Kate, you don't really believe such talk. She told me the greatest lot of rubbish."

I felt secretly relieved that I hadn't committed my visit to the ruined mill to a letter. We said no more then, but I found my mind turning over what she had said afterwards. Rissa was tireless in her attendance on her father. I had to give her credit for that in spite of her loveless words. Nat had at least been sorry he couldn't feel affection. He regretted the love he could not summon. But she went through the motions of a devoted daughter with the cool precision of the little woodmen at their appointed hours. I watched her, half troubled and half admiring. It seemed queer that I, who had hated the Major upon first sight, and who still feared him, should now be taking his part against Rissa. I couldn't quite reconcile it in myself, but then, I would think, she hadn't seen his despair the night of the fire, or overheard his anxious talks with Henry Willis. She hadn't passed his study as I had before his illness and seen him figuring on sheets of paper with worry darkening his face. He never spoke another word about the "Rainbow", though it was common talk in the village that an investigator was coming from Boston to see if he could find any clues. Death was in Major Fortune's eyes, though he, too, went through the appointed mo-

tions of life. I couldn't put it into words at the time, though I know now that I was aware of it more and more that winter.

I had my wish for Christmas. We three were all together under The Folly roof. Nat came on the packet a few days before Christmas, and lucky he did, too, for on the next one snow fell and sleet followed and the boat stayed in harbor for almost a week. Rissa's face lost its tightened look from the moment Nat stepped across the threshold, and even the Major seemed to welcome the gay spirits he fetched with him. He hardly curbed him at all on that visit and the east parlor rang to the music of harp and fiddle and piano keys. I think he felt that Nat might be indulged a bit now that he had embarked on a sensible future. And Nat responded like one of mother's Chinese lily bulbs carried up from cellar to the sunniest kitchen window. I never saw him so free or happy.

"Father didn't die, Kate," he told me soon after his return. "I was fearful he would; and then I'd always have felt it was because I couldn't feel the way I ought to about him. You know, the way I told you?"

"I don't believe that would have made any difference, Nat."

"Still, I'd always have felt it might and now perhaps it will all be different. Maybe he'll come to know I can do things, even if they're not what he planned."

"You mean those music lessons? Rissa had to tell me and I promised not to let on."

"I like to have you know," he looked pleased and smiling. "It's like our old secret society,—the S.S. double P. Do you remember?"

"Oh, Nat, as if I could ever forget it and the way it ended."

"We'll forget that part. It's over,—" He snapped his thin fingers, "like that. We're grown up now, all three of us, and you've got ahead of Rissa. You're going to be married."

"Not for years and years. She'll be ahead of me with a husband and house of her own most likely."

"I'll start thinking of that when Nat's a famous composer." Rissa joined us, just in time to hear my last words. She slipped

her arm through his and they went back to the harp and piano.

I couldn't help a little twinge, knowing that they forgot me the instant they returned to their music. I shared the new secret with them, but it wasn't like the old days when they had needed me to keep watch at the window.

Jake Bullard resented their return. He wanted all my thoughts to be centered on him and he was always edgy and fault finding when those two were about. I had turned to him more in my loneliness and fright over the fire, and it was only natural he should be put out when I couldn't give him my whole attention. Now that winter had set in he couldn't be out much in his boat. He had more time to hang about and expect me to be with him, while I had more than one pair of hands could do. Mother leaned on me harder with Annie at home so much. The Major needed special dishes to tempt his appetite, and Henry Willis was now a permanent member of the household.

The snow turned to sleet and stopped about noon two days before Christmas. The wind died till there was only a steady drone from the spruces, not the fierce roar and creak of sawing branches that had kept up all the day and night before. Every twig and cone and leafless bush glittered as the pale afternoon sun touched the thin wrappings of ice. The snow had a crust that twinkled like a rough mirror. George and Bo had taken the cutter to the village for errands after dinner. I thought Nat had gone with them, but to my surprise he appeared at the kitchen door in an old coat of his father's, and a coon-skin cap. He had a hatchet in his hand and I could tell by the way he raised his left eyebrow at me that he was in high spirits.

"I'm going out to cut Christmas greens," he announced, "and I want Kate to come, too. She knows where to find the best ones, so you'll let her off, won't you, Mrs. Fernald?"

"Well, I must say you've picked a nice busy time," mother grumbled. "Look at what we've laid out to do before supper." She pointed to the table where we were rolling pie-crust and cookie dough. "Can't Rissa go with you instead?"

"She's reading to father, and she threw away her old boots thinking she wouldn't need them this winter. Besides I want Kate."

"Christmas greens won't do for dinner tomorrow."

"Here, I'll help you!" Nat seized a pan of cookies and made for the stove.

"Heaven prevent!" Mother snatched it from him. "I'd sooner have that pet fox of the Horton boys in my kitchen! Well," she had to laugh and give in in spite of herself, "I expect I might's well let her go. It'll be less work in the end. Run along, Kate, only wrap up warm and don't forget the time."

"We won't. I've got my watch." Nat pulled it out of his pocket to prove it to her. Then he seized both my floury hands. "Heigh-ho, it's almost Merry Christmas!"

He whirled me about till the warm kitchen swam about me.

*"O come all ye faithful—
Joyful and triumphant—"*

He began to sing in his deep full voice as he spun mother round in her turn.

"Now, now, that's enough," she panted as he dropped her into her old rocker between the windows. "Maybe you won't always be so joyful and triumphant or get your way so easy."

We went on singing it as we stepped off together into the cold.

"'O come all ye faithful—' that's you, Kate," he threw into the hymn before the next line. "'Joyful and triumphant—' that's me—. 'O come ye, O come ye,—To Fortune's woods—There to replenish—'" Laughter rang in his voice as he twisted the words to suit us. "'Evergreen and berry—'" "'O come let us go cut them,—O come let us go cut them,—O come let us go cut them,—You and me.'"

I hummed it with him.

"You'd better not let mother hear you taking a hymn in vain," I cautioned. "She'd think it was wrong."

"But you don't, Kate," he swung me by the hand as we struck into the woods. "You like to have me go on, don't you?"

"Oh, yes, I was fearful of Christmas without you at The Folly, and now——"

"Now we're all here together. You see it was foolish to be afraid. Seems a pity we have to be so much of the time."

"Well," I said, "that's the way it has to be, I guess, the more you get to caring for things, or for people the more afraid it makes you of losing them."

He nodded and we went on deeper into the woods, but heading towards where they thinned out to an old pasture where we should find juniper and ground pine under the snow. No one had been there before us, and we scarcely left a heel dent on the crust. The spruce trunks laid long, wavering bands of blue on the narrow track we followed. Sometimes a bluejay flashed its wings and cried, or a far crow broke the stillness. Our two breaths streamed before us on the sharp, pure air.

"Listen," Nat said, "there's Frisky. Wonder how she got out?"

"Trust her to find a way. She ought to have a little coat to wear in this weather. She feels it more now she's getting older."

"I guess her spirits'll keep her warm. Hey, there, you little rascal, I told you to stay home."

Her small, brown shape was making for us; her thin sticks of legs sped so fast her paws could get no grip on the icy crust. She slipped and slid as she came on, with grim determination and an old sock of Nat's gripped in her teeth for a peace offering. We had to stand and laugh without scolding her.

"See, she thinks it's all right as long as she fetches you something for a present." I told him. "Mother says lots of folks reason the same way."

"That's the lady of it!" He bent to her small, wagging body. "Here, I don't need this muffler your mother made me take. We'll wind her up in it like a blue cocoon."

But it went so many times round her that I thought she

looked more like a hedgehog. She wagged and snurled when I tied the fringes fast on top, and ran before us through the trees.

"She's really your dog now, Kate."

"She's yours when you play the piano. Sometimes if I'm cleaning in the east parlor and run my duster over the keys she'll come on the run, looking for you to be there. And when I say 'No, Frisky, it's just me, not Nat,' she'll put her tail down real disappointed. You ought to see her."

"Good little Frisky." He threw the old sock off across the snow for her to fetch. "Well, at least I can count on you three when I play. Maybe you're the only ones that ever will want to listen."

"Oh, you know better'n to say such things."

"No, I don't. How should I?"

"Because there's something you've got in you that nobody, not even Rissa has. It'll make you do things. It's something extra like what the wild geese have when they fly so sure and pointing. You know what I mean?"

"Yes, I know, but I wish I had as easy a way to get abroad as they have." He smiled and sighed.

"I expect you've got to go that far, but I wish you didn't have to."

"I have to go. I don't know exactly why, but I must. You see, Kate, I'm trying to learn how to write music for orchestras, strings and horns and flutes and brasses and drums. That's what I've always wanted to do, I guess, even before I ever heard anything but our old piano and harp."

He broke off, but his eyes were glazed over in the old excited way.

"Well," I had to remind him, "you made those seals sit up and take notice once, just with that old whistle. So I wouldn't put it past you to make people too."

"Kate," he stopped short, for we had come out where the trees were thinning into the pasture, "if I ever do write any music fit to hear, will you promise to come and listen?"

"I promise," I said, very low and solemn as we stood there

side by side at the edge of the clearing. "Yes, I'll be there to hear you, no matter what."

He hacked away some spruce and fir boughs, drooping with icy cones, and we found plenty of juniper, blue and bristling as we pulled it out of the snow. I tied them with string I had brought and Nat swung them to his shoulder in a great glittering sheaf.

"We might find some black alder berries down by the Creek," I told him. "Let's go back along the shore."

So we plunged into the woods again and came out by the frozen inlet. The last of the winter sunlight dazzled our eyes and there, right at our feet was a clump of living scarlet, every berry lustered over with ice. Nothing in the world ever has seemed so bright to me as those red berries, turned to fiery drops by a long, slanting shaft of sun. It was as if some secret fire of earth burned there in the still cold; as if the black twigs that held the miracle must be consumed before our very eyes. It seemed all wrong somehow that Nat and I should be able to bear the sight. I don't know whether it was a minute or half an hour that we stood there without speaking. Then the sun dropped behind Jubilee Mountain, taking the wonder with it.

"I can cut it now," Nat spoke regretfully, "I shouldn't have dared lay a hand to it before."

"Not while the light lasted," I agreed, "it seemed almost like some kind of a sign."

"There's nobody to say it wasn't." He knelt to cut the stems carefully so that not a berry should fall. I took them in my arms to carry back as if they were more than red berries.

Nat lifted the greens to his shoulder again.

"We're bringing back the woods," he said, his narrow face quick and woodlike among the icy tufts of juniper and spruce and ground pine, with the small brown cones just the color of his coonskin cap. I laughed at his words, yet for some reason they stirred me. I don't believe he meant them to have any special meaning, but now I think that perhaps there was one. Perhaps it was that we alone of all that countryside kept some ancient

rite in snowy woods on the shortest day of the year. Happiness choked me, and though my feet were numb under my woolen stockings and heavy boots, I moved with quick, sure steps. Perhaps it was the sharper cold with the coming on of dark that made me walk as if I had slipped from my own body, though I was aware of the warmth my flesh gave out in the dusky chillness, wrapping me in a glowing circle of my own making. Frisky ran ahead, her fringes flapping ridiculously, but even she kept silence with us. We followed the shore, and when we came out by the boathouse, there was Whale Back Light's far signal over dimming water. In the curve of beach under Porcupine Head the sticks of an old weir stood out like black bones. I don't know why I should remember them so all these years after, but I do.

The Folly lights streamed over the snowy drive to meet us, and Rissa was playing as we came in.

"Well, if you don't put those berries to shame," Mother was saying a moment later when I burst into the kitchen. "It's long past six and Jake here's been cooling his heels the last hour waiting for you."

"Why, hello, Jake," I felt as if I had been roused from sleep, "I didn't look for you till tomorrow or next day."

"I expect you'd of gone just the same," he grumbled, "even if you'd known I was bound here. Well, guess I'd better be off."

He took his stocking feet from the oven step and reached for his boots.

"Now, Jake, don't get so huffy," Mother told him. "Kate didn't have a thought you'd turn up and you're too young to get so touchy. You've been smelling my hot supper for an hour so you'd better stay."

Jake had almost forgotten his grudge by the time we were through and ready to make pop-corn over the open stove lid. He shook the popper tirelessly, and smelling it and the boiling molasses, Nat and Rissa came out to join us. I was fearful when I heard them, but Nat was his pleasantest, so that Jake couldn't

take any offence. We played games with nut meats, as easy as if we'd been children, and mother, too, joined in with us.

"Well," Jake said at last, cramming a fistful of popcorn into his mouth, "I've got three miles and a half to go, so I'd better be moving. I'll be along day after tomorrow, Kate, to say Merry Christmas."

"Merry Christmas yourself, Jake Bullard," Nat called after us as I went to let him out of the entry door, "Let nothing you dismay!"

He began to hum the rest of the carol, but I saw Jake go red to his ears.

"He needn't give me any of that," he muttered as I helped him into his coat and tucked the present I'd made for him in his pocket. "He'll be dismayed a good sight ahead of me."

"Oh, he didn't mean any harm," I said, "that's just from an old song."

"Well, I don't want songs from him or any other. How 'bout a hug seeing it's most Christmas?"

He gave me an extra fond one.

"Listen, Kate," he whispered, "I come up specially to tell you, but I didn't have a chance at you alone till now. It's about Sam and that insurance man from Boston. He was up yesterday and asked a lot of questions."

"Oh, Jake, he didn't get hold of anything, did he?" My heart skipped a beat before he could answer.

"Not a thing. I was there the whole time and heard every word. Sam acted kind of dumb and feeble. Martha said how Sam was home all through it and I spoke up and said I was to Rockland with Will. He went back today so we don't have to worry."

"It was ever so good of you to come up and tell me, Jake. But I still do get feeling troubled about it, what with Christmas and all—"

"What's Christmas got to do with it?" He turned cross again.
"I tell you it's all over and done with now."

calling. "Maybe you two can keep each other warm, but we're about frozen."

I pulled it to and went back to the fire and their amused glances.

"That's what I call devotion, Kate," Rissa announced, "to have some one walk here and back from Little Prospect just to see you."

"Yes," mother nodded, "Jake's a good boy, if he don't have much to say for himself. Still, there's no denying actions speak louder'n words in zero weather!"

CHAPTER XV

BY FEBRUARY the Major was pronounced fit to go to Philadelphia with Rissa. Only Henry Willis stayed on with Mother and me at The Folly. He made regular errands to the ship-yard and mill, and spent hours sorting over papers in the study, but the business was dead and he knew it. We all knew it without giving a sign. No one bothered to mention the "Rainbow" now. Annie Button's ailments; the coming church sociable; the new schoolteacher from Bangor, and the next summer cottages to go up after the spring thaw were our chief concerns.

Mother was determined I should start a hope-chest like the other girls. I couldn't see the sense of it, since Jake and I had such vague prospects, but she was set and I had plenty of time for sewing. Jake liked to see me hemming sheets and pillow cases afternoons when he could get up. He would sit by the stove watching me and telling us all the latest news from the Harbor.

"Three new cottages contracted for over to Bartlett's Cove," he said on one of these visits. "Ed Staples has got one and I Hard-ing the other two. They plan to break ground early and push 'em through by July. They'll pay me two dollars a day to lug beach stones up for the chimneys."

"Mercy," Mother exclaimed, "with all those stones in the pastures I don't see the sense to going clear down to the shore."

"Why, Mis' Fernald," Jake told her, "you'd ought to know better'n that. Field stone's no good for chimneys, it takes those round, hard ones you can only get on the outer beaches. I know the kind they want and I'll have to go out in the old dory and pick proper ones by hand."

"Sounds like back-breaking work to me."

"They wouldn't give such good pay if 'twas easy. Yes, I'm going to have a busy spring, with that and fixing my boat, and then I'll start delivering fish and lobsters again."

"That ought to help your bank account," I said. It always pleased Jake to have me mention that.

"I hope so. I've set myself to scrape up another three hundred dollars by fall. There's a nice piece of land I've got my eye on over east of the schoolhouse. I mean to get it ahead of any one else."

"You mean the old Noyes place?" I had often passed it by water and even gone berrying once or twice back of the deserted house.

"That's it,—'bout six acres all told."

"But the house is nothing but an old shell, Jake," mother reminded him, "it's most to pieces."

"I could get it jacked up in odd times. It's the land I'm counting on. That's bound to bring a good price if I can hang on. Most all the best shore sites are gone now."

"Summer company do buy the most God-forsaken tracts," Mother admitted, "where there isn't enough soil to raise a hill of potatoes."

"It's the view they're after," Jake spoke with amused scorn. "You'd ought to hear 'em. You can sell any heap of rocks if there's water to look at. Guess if they had to go out in it after November they wouldn't hanker so much. I thought I'd keep the farmhouse against the time Kate and I can use it and let the rest of the shore front go in two-acre lots. I'd stand to clear a couple of thousand after it was paid up."

"My, Jake," I said, "you talk real easy in thousands."

"I mean to keep on talking in 'em," he told me, "It's the only way to get ahead. If I had a few right now I'd pick up those three islands they call 'The Nuggets'."

"Now, Jake, talk sense," Mother broke in. "It's one thing to buy some place within five miles of town, but those islands,—you must be crazy!"

"You wait and see if I am. Ten years from now there'll be houses on every one."

"I wouldn't mind living on an island," I said.

"Well, you'd never get me out to one," Mother shook her head emphatically. "I don't feel inclined to have seas washing clear over my roof in storms, and it's no place to raise a family."

Jake sent me a grin and I bent lower over my sewing.

"He's got a real good head for business," she said later when we were alone, "though where he gets it from I'm sure I don't know. He'll land on top someday for he won't let a cent get away from him. You'll never come to want with Jake but it won't be easy spiriting it out of his pocket and you're as open handed as he is close-fisted. Yes, you'll have plenty of words about money or I miss my guess."

Mother was a better prophet than she knew as things turned out. The first quarrel we had came about over a sum of money the very next week. It followed on the heels of a letter I had from Sadie Berry. It was the first time she had answered any of mine, and I hadn't read far before I knew that what mother and Annie had expected to happen to her had come about. She wrote that she was in the worst kind of trouble, and trouble for a single girl meant just one kind in Little Prospect. She didn't say much beside except that she ought to have known better than to get herself in such a fix, but she had been lonely when she went there and he had been good to her at first. They had found out at the hotel and she had been out of work for two months. Now she knew she must come home for her time was July and she had used up all her money. She knew if I could, that I'd help her out and she would do the same for me if I ever needed it. I read her letter over and over, trying to believe the words. But I couldn't seem to, in spite of the way everyone had predicted it last fall even before she went away. Sadie was only a year or so older than I and yet she was going to have a baby, the kind that people pointed out with sly looks for not having the right kind of father. I knew she must be at her wits' end or she would never think of coming back. I had

fifty three dollars saved up in the Rockland Bank; money from picking berries and doing errands and the five dollar gold pieces the Major used to give every Christmas before times were so hard. It wasn't much, but it would help and I wanted to get it to her. She had asked me not to tell anyone, so I couldn't very well ask mother to let me go to Rockland without explanations. Finally I was driven to asking a favor of Jake.

We had gone out to the corn crib to fetch mother a basket of cobs, and he was in a pleasant mood that afternoon.

"Jake," I said, taking the bank book out of my pocket, "I never asked you for a real favor before, but I need fifty dollars and I thought you could get it for me. I've got that much in the bank, you can see here it's all written down and I'll give you this to keep for it, till I can get to the bank. I need it right off, but you know mother'd never let me go off there alone."

"I should hope she wouldn't." He stood there among the heaped up corncobs and looked at me as if I'd lost my reason. "What do you want with so much money?"

"I can't tell you, Jake, I promised. But I've got to have it."

"I'll bet it's those Fortunes putting you up to it."

"You always jump on Nat and Rissa. It's got nothing to do with them, Jake, and I thought you'd help me out instead of getting mad as a turkey-cock."

"You'd oughtn't to have secrets from me anyhow."

It was maddening the way he kept on filling the basket with cobs.

"It isn't my secret," I hedged. "Seems to me you might trust me once in awhile now we're going to get married."

"That don't make sense." He gave a short, disagreeable laugh, the kind that always put me on edge. "Married folks don't have secrets from each other."

"I guess plenty do," I dropped an armful of cobs so they went rolling in every direction. "If you really cared about me you wouldn't act so stingy. I'm only asking you to loan it to me anyhow. Here's the book to prove I can pay you back."

"You needn't get so worked up, for I won't do it. You can't

throw your money away for something you don't see fit to tell me about, and you might just as well know it once and for all."

"It's only fifty dollars," I thought for a moment I could still humor him into it.

"Oh, it's only fifty dollars," He mocked me as he had never done before. "That's a month's pay for hard work in all weather. I guess you've got Fortune notions—easy come, and easy go."

"You just leave Fortune's out of this," I blazed at him. "I worked for some of that money as hard as you do for yours. I'm not stealing it even if you act same as if I was."

I turned and hid in the boathouse till I was sure he was gone.

"Well," Mother said when I came in at last, hoping my face didn't show red from crying, "You and Jake had some kind of a rumpus out there. He come in half an hour ago, black's a thunderhead and wouldn't hear of staying to supper though I asked him. You don't look so happy yourself."

"Jake can be pretty mean sometimes," I told her, "Yes, we had a kind of argument."

She gave me a sharp look and seeing that I had taken it hard, asked me no more.

It seemed almost like an answer to prayer a day or two later when George found he needed supplies he couldn't get in the village. That meant a day's trip to Rockland and I knew he would ask me to go along. When he did so, mother made no objection to my going.

"Do you good to have a day off after this cooped-up winter," she said. "I wouldn't mind going myself if it weren't for the weather."

I drew a long breath once I had the money in bills and started off in an envelope to Sadie, though I still smarted from those words with Jake. They had shaken me more than I knew at the time and I kept going over to myself all we had said.

But before I had Sadie's letter thanking me, Jake and I had made up our quarrel, or rather we never mentioned it again. Each of us felt in the right and waited for the other to apologise. The first time he came up to The Folly afterwards

we both acted stiff as poker. But we grew easier and fell back into the old ways, though neither of us forgot it. We were like two sharp edged stones on a beach that must be worn down by time and tides to fit one another's rough corners.

My nineteenth birthday fell in March on the Vernal Equinox and that year it was raw and windy up to the night before. But the day was clear and fresh with the first hint of spring in the pallid sunshine. Roads were oozy with mud and there were still patches of left-over snow on hills and in hollows, but the willows down by the bridge showed yellowish tips and shadows everywhere had a different look.

"Well, you've got fair weather for your birthday, Kate," Mother greeted me. "Not much like the time you was born. Far inland as it was we got a terrible fall of rain and the wind blew fit to lift the roof off. Yes, your poor father used to remark on your being an Equinoctial child."

"It's queer the sun should make such a stir crossing the line," I said, "so many thousands of miles off."

"It's the start of spring," she reminded me. "Say what you want to we're all in the hands of the sun as well as the Creator. You can sort of feel the difference once it's got across. Days'll begin to lengthen and this everlasting winter'll be elbowed out the back door."

We laughed at the picture she made of the seasons and went on with our breakfast.

"I wouldn't wonder but what Jake might make shift to get up this afternoon," she said, "I believe I'll cook something extra for supper."

He came around four with a present for me on his shoulders. It was a wooden chest, painted blue after the fashion of those that men took to sea. Adam Harding had made it, but Jake had done the painting himself and put my initials on the lid. It had plenty of room for all my linen and a quilt or two and there was a wooden till at one side for bits of finery.

"I left a place to add the B. after the K. and F." He pointed out. "I was all for putting it in, but Martha wouldn't let me.

She says it's bad luck to beforehand. Not that I take any stock in such notions, but we might's well wait till we spliced for good 'n' all."

"You made a lovely job of those letters," I told him. "Let's fill it right now with all I've got done."

He carried it up to my room and watched as I laid in my few belongings. Rissa had remembered the day and sent a pair of fawn colored gloves with pearl buttons and for once he had no unpleasant remarks to make when I showed them to him.

"Martha was nineteen when she and Sam got married," he remarked suddenly, "too bad we've got to wait so long."

"Mother says she's glad to keep me a few years more, and I haven't got half enough things ready."

"I paid a hundred and fifty dollars down on the old Noyes place," he went on. "That's to hold it till I can pay the rest in October."

"Then it's really yours, Jake?"

"Just about. I wasn't going to see it fall into any other hands. If I can get some summer person interested maybe I can get it clear by another season and we can start to fix up the house. You'd like to live there, wouldn't you?"

"Oh, yes, I've always thought it was pretty over that way and there'll be berries there all summer long."

"Well, we can't live on berries, you know." Jake laughed and I did too.

We parted more close than we had been since our flare-up.

I was watching any day for word of Sadie Berry's return, though I was fearful of mother's remarks when she heard of the trouble. I was possessed with curiosity about her. I tried to suppose it had happened to me and then I would go hot and cold by turns wondering what I should do if it had. But it was all a vague and hazy dream to me till the night I helped George see Bessie through her calving.

She was a new cow he had taken the September before in exchange for the two old ones. She was a pretty creature, tan and cream colored, with almost the ways of a house pet. We were

all fond of her and George had never set such store by any animal on the place. He had figured on her having the calf in early April and planned accordingly. But the moon was against us in this. George sometimes tried to discount the importance of full moon in his planting and planning, though in the end he usually admitted he might as well have gone by it from the start. So as April dragged on he reminded us of the moon and insisted the calf was waiting till it reached the full. The night it was due to be so he came into the kitchen looking anxious.

"Well," mother teased him, "here's your full moon and what about Bessie?"

George was in no mood for joking.

"She's bad," he announced, "been acting that way since daylight. I guess we're in for a night of it."

"I always said she was too pretty and delicate bred to be hardy," mother reminded him. "No, she was never one I'd of picked."

"She ain't had a poor spell since I got her," George would never stand for any criticism of her. "You can't tell till you've seen 'em through once how they'll be. Some of the mean, bony ones has it easier. I come in to ask you to leave the big kettle on when you go to bed. I'll need hot water to fix her a mash later."

He was in again just before mother and I went to bed.

"No, not yet," he told us. "I declare I wish I'd got Sam Stanley up to help me. I never knew a cow take it so hard and I seen plenty of calfings in my time."

"Cows don't ever die having calves, do they?" I asked him.

"Not's a rule," he said, "but I s'pose anything can happen once. I don't like her looks and I'm afraid it's a dreadful big calf."

"Now, George," mother broke in with a quick glance in my direction, "you better remember Kate's a young girl and not used to such things. If that cow was human you couldn't make more fuss over her."

"She acts 'bout human to me, Mis' Fernald, that's a fact.

I've used all the tricks I ever heard of to ease her but she just stands there in her stall making groans and rolling her eyes at me till I'm most crazy."

"Do you want me to come out and see her?" I asked.

"Well, you might fetch another lantern while I pitch down some more straw."

But mother didn't take to that idea.

"I won't have you call on Kate for any such business," she announced. "You and Bessie can just put that calf through between you. It's no proper sight for a girl to see and maybe get ideas against her own time. If you need any help you'd better take me."

"Now, Mis' Fernald," George protested, "you know Bessie's not used to you same's she is to Kate. She'll get skittish if you set foot in the barn."

He went off again and we blew out the lamps and took our bedroom candles.

"He's taking it harder'n that cow," she said on the way upstairs, "but there, he's got an awful soft heart. Annie says he's never got over her losing the only baby they ever had. It's no joke to lose a valuable cow either, two of 'em when it comes to that. Well, I always said she was too showy for service."

We parted at our doors but I couldn't get the doings in the barn out of my mind. After awhile I heard the long rumblings from the other side of the wall which told me mother was asleep and I got up. The clock was striking ten as I slipped into my clothes and stole downstairs. I thought Frisky's welcome in the kitchen would rouse mother, but I got her quiet and let myself out.

The April moon was well up and a wide, white track stretched from the horizon to the pricking ridge of trees on Porcupine Head. It lay so shining and straight it might have been a long highway, unseen by day, but there for any foot to tread. I found myself believing that George was right about the moon having us all in her power as well as poor Bessie whose faint sounds of distress came to me as I neared the barn. They

were almost human as George had said, but there was a queer, questioning dumbness as well that made me uneasy. She lay on a pile of straw, her great shape heaving and round under the light of a lantern hung from a beam above her stall. I could see her eyes as I came closer, glazed red over their softness.

"I've tried to keep her on her feet," George explained, "but she's all beat out. Your Ma'll give me the devil if she finds you sneaked out here."

"She won't," I promised, "I couldn't sleep without knowing how things were."

Bessie gave another deep low and he bent to her.

"Now then, Bessie," he soothed her, "now then, don't you get wadgettity. The moon's up and we'll see you through."

I hesitated to go nearer, but George was reassuring.

"She's gentle as ever. You can pet her the way she's laying with no fear of her hoofs."

I began to stroke her in the soft hollows behind her ears as I had done so often at the pasture bars. Her breathing was short and difficult; her mouth open, with the tongue lolling limply. I was surprised to see how long and lax it looked when she was not flapping it after flies. I stroked her a good while till she struggled to her feet again.

"Maybe you'd better go back now," George said, "you know what your Ma said."

But I kept watch with him for the next hour in the old barn. It was very strange to me, being out there in the night, and I shall never forget the sounds from stalls and hayloft; from unseen rafters and black corners. Bats were on the wing, swooping low in the lantern light, while all the field mice that lived above in the warm hay made merry with squeaks and scuttlings. The hens and roosters were deceived into untimely clucks and crows whenever they woke and mistook the lantern glow for dawn. Fancy and Fanny pawed and made sleepy whinnyings from their stalls. Sometimes, in the spells when Bessie was quieter, there were other unaccustomed rustlings and thuds and subdued

creaks. A cricket chirped rustily as if it were fall instead of spring.

"Nobody knows—Nobody knows—Nobody knows," the pin prick of infinitesimal voices seemed to be saying over and over to my strained ears.

Always before when I had been up late it had been in a world of people. But that night as I waited, chilled through in spite of the hay in an old cart where I huddled, I felt truly alone in the animal kingdom. The air was charged with living smells. The fragrance of dried grass; the dustiness of grains and old blankets; the heavy, richer smells of dung and droppings and leather, mingled with mice and apples and milk and animal breaths overpowered me. Yes, I thought, night belongs to beasts and birds and little unguessed insects. We use or forget them by day, but in the darkness they stir and speak an unknown tongue. Even long ago in Bethlehem Mary and Joseph and the Child were only strangers in their world. It was the beasts who gave them shelter and warmth. Dick Halter had told us once that he had heard an old legend about farm animals still falling on their knees at twelve o'clock each Christmas Eve. I found myself remembering and believing it that April night.

"Talk about women having all the trouble," George said to me once, "I guess there ain't many stop to think a cow or a mare or a sheep can feel the same."

"It doesn't seem right for dumb things to have to suffer." I told him.

"Everything pays dear for breath, whether it's wanted or not." His words came solemnly to me like something out of the Old Testament.

Bessie bore her calf just before midnight with only what encouragement George and I could give her. He went back to the kitchen to fetch the kettle and I watched that pair with a new sort of pang. Bessie had done her best. Pain had been hers, as perhaps it would be mine someday. I was shaken now that the danger was past and her trial safely over. As I stared in the uncertain light I saw her tongue reach out and begin a feeble lick-

ing at the queer shape beside her which had so lately been her burden. That gesture, more than all the night's work, made me want to cry. Yes, I had it in my heart to envy that dumb beast in her hour.

CHAPTER XVI

THAT summer of 1886 is a time by which I mark the beginning and end of many things, though as the days and nights passed one into another I was not aware of all that they must mean to me. Change crept over Fortune's Folly and indeed over all that countryside. It came like the warning wave that marks the turn of tide. For Little Prospect it was the wave that brought in the flood of new prosperity; for the Fortune family it began the ebb, whose depths were still unguessed by us all.

Major Fortune and Bo returned before Rissa. That was early May and you could hear the ring of axes and hammers from headland to headland all along shore. Those houses would seem few today to make such a stir, but then a single new one was an event to the neighborhood. At least a dozen were in various stages that season and we dreaded the Major's first sight of them. Perhaps he would have taken it less hard if he had had his old strength and spirit. The doctors might call him cured, but he was like a mended main-mast, outwardly whole, yet only good for fair weather sailing. I knew the moment George drove him back from the landing that he could not reconcile himself to what he saw. After the greetings were over he stood on the upper landing looking away to the dark thronged shore and the square skeletons of three new houses that rose sharply out of unbroken green.

"Well, Henry," he said at last turning back to his friend, "that's the beginning of the end."

"I don't like it any more than you do, Nathaniel, but we've got about as much chance of stopping it as old Canute had of interfering with the tide. I don't know as I can blame them for

wanting to make a living off strangers with shipping what it is."

"You'll be calling it 'progress' in another minute." The Major had mustered some of his old spirit. "But it's not as if real people were going to live in them. They're not built for winter weather any more than those cellarless, flimsy houses they're jacking up are. They're a pack of fools in the village not to see it."

"You can't expect them to hold out against spot cash. They've got to live and raise their families and you know what this land's like for farming."

"There's the sea, Henry. Their fathers and yours and mine found it pretty good pasturage. Real men would stick to that without toadying to a lot of flush upstarts from God knows where."

"Well, we can't stop them from selling. You'd better be thankful you've got acres enough to protect you on both sides."

"That won't stop them from crowding me, too. I can see ahead if you can't."

"Well, I can see as far as the first of next month when that last note you gave on the yard is coming due. That's plenty to keep me awake nights."

They went back to the study and I heard no more till after supper.

Mother was gloomy when we talked of the Major.

"He'll never be the man he was," she told me. "He'll go down someday like a thousand of brick."

The two men were mostly silent through supper; neither ate heartily or commented on the meal mother had taken such pains to prepare. They were deep in business later when I carried their coffee into the study.

"You know it amounts to the same thing in the end," I heard Henry Willis saying as I left, and I knew the old argument was on between them. "Save the ship-yard and you'll have to sell off another big tract of land. You'll only get a good price for shore frontage and that'll bring cottages almost to your own front door."

"I'll never stand for that and you ought to know it, not while I've got two hundred solid acres both sides of the Creek."

"And I'm advising you to hang on to them," his friend was going on patiently. "Let the bank take over the ship-yard and you'll have one less burden to carry for dead loss."

"You know what they'll do with it, Henry?"

"I know, that big summer hotel project. They're going to put one up somewhere. Might better be there than here in Little Prospect."

"I'd as soon see a factory set up in our family burial lot."

"I don't like the notion any better than you do, but I haven't spent the winter figuring and contriving without knowing facts. After all it isn't as if Nat had a head for business."

"No, he wouldn't care what became of the yard." I knew the hardness would be in the Major's voice at mention of Nat, and there it was, more bitter than ever. "Henry," he went on almost pleading, it seemed to me, listening from the hall, "you can't just wipe out something that's been known and respected all over the globe for a hundred years."

I did not wait for the answer. I knew what it would be. When I got back to the kitchen again I found Jake Bullard there with mother. They were deep in something evidently not intended for my ears, which made me all the more curious. Jake came up less often nowadays, being out in his boat from early till late. He began at once telling me how he and Tom Sackett had been out to the far side of Little Heron Island where the big winter seas left the best stones for chimneys.

"I guess between us we must have picked up half a ton a'ready," he said, helping himself to more coffee. "We anchor the old sloop in a cove nearby and fetch the loads in my dory. Throw 'em in one boat and then pitch 'em into another. I've got so I don't see nothing awake or asleep but beach stones."

He did look tired, almost worn under his sunburn. I noticed for the first time that he had lost his stocky boyishness. He seemed a grown man suddenly, hardened as if the stones had put something of their granite into his veins.

"I wish you didn't have to," I said, troubled by the change in him. "I'll be glad when you can go back to the lobstering and sailing again."

"Oh, I never was afraid of work. You'll see, all I want is a chance to get somewhere for it."

I brought my sewing and we sat by the nickel lamp on the red tablecloth while mother stepped over to see George and Annie, and that was when Jake told me the news he had brought. He hadn't meant to tell me at first, he explained, but I was bound to hear it soon. Sadie Berry was back and in trouble.

"Nobody's much surprised," he went on, "she was headed right for it from the start. Martha saw her over to the post office this morning, bold as brass, she said she was. I thought your mother'd ought to know. You might be planning to go see her."

"I'll go over first chance I can get."

"Your ma'll have a lot to say 'bout that," he warned me. "She's all steamed up over it. I wouldn't take up with Sadie if I was you, Kate. It don't look right."

"But I'm fond of her, Jake, and I wouldn't like to go back on her because this thing's happened."

"You're an awful fool, Kate." Fortunately Jake was tired enough to be indulgent with me that night. "I don't know when you're going to start getting sense knocked into you. Look, here's a present I found for you. I come near carrying it back again in my pocket."

It was a bit of rock crystal from a ledge where the men had been blasting. I set it under the lamp light and we stared at the pointed tongues of clear white quartz.

"I don't believe a real diamond's any prettier," I told him.

"If 'twas a diamond and that size we'd be on easy street," he laughed. "Too bad you can't have it for a ring. Never mind, you'll have one some day, but a house and bank account come first,—anyhow after kisses."

He gave me several and we only stopped when we heard mother on the steps. After he had gone she began on Sadie and left no doubt about her own feelings.

"I won't have you going down to see her," she wound up. "She never was your sort and I always mistrusted her. You can say what you want to, a girl only has herself to blame for that kind of thing and from what Jake says she don't show the proper feelings."

"Sadie never shows her feelings, mother. She puts on a lot of spunk,—that's her way. I don't see where the harm is in my going to see her just once maybe."

"The harm's done whether you see it or not. I must say it was real thoughtful of Jake to take the trouble to come up and tell me."

"I guess he likes to gossip as well as the rest," I muttered, putting away the bit of crystal in the work-box with a sigh.

"Well, you remember I won't have you streaking down to the Berry place."

I didn't exactly disobey her, but I did write Sadie a letter and we arranged to meet back of the schoolhouse the next Saturday. I was going to the Jordans for supper and could stop there on my way. She was waiting for me under the big pine where we used to eat our lunches. I thought she would look more changed than she did. It was warm for May and she had on a stylish print dress and jacket and a sailor hat such as I had seen summer visitors wear. Her soft roundness helped hide her size and her eyes were as blue and her hair as yellow as ever. We kissed each other the way we had the day she left.

"Oh, Sadie," I apologised, "I hope you don't mind about mother not letting me come to your house."

She gave a short, amused laugh.

"I knew she wouldn't. I knew what to expect same's I wrote you."

"I told her I couldn't see what difference it made between us."

"Never mind, Kate, you can't tell me anything they say I don't know a'ready. It was good you could spare me that money. I don't know what I'd of done without it. Maybe I can pay you back soon. Anyways I won't forget it, you'll see."

"Didn't he give you any?" I ventured.

"Money? Why, he don't even *know*. I wrote him, but the letter come back. He travels for a dry goods company. I don't expect I'll ever see him again, and I couldn't look to him anyhow. He was married and I knew it."

"Your folks are going to see you through, aren't they?"

"I guess so, babies are one crop that never failed in our family. Mother took it better'n I expected. The girls pass mean remarks though, specially Lou now she's got a beau of her own. Well, it won't be long till the end of July."

"Are you—scared?" I couldn't keep from asking her.

"Well, kind of. I heard mother carry on her last time and I wish I hadn't." Her face grew sharper as she spoke, though she tried to sound careless. "But I don't know's you have it any easier if you're married."

"You must have been awfully fond of him."

"Sometimes I was and sometimes I wasn't. He was grand company and a good spender when he had it. I'll say that for him. But I won't ever be any such fool about a man again. It don't pay."

"Love's queer—" I began.

"You're right it is." She spoke almost roughly. "You wait and see, only I expect it'll be different with you and Jake."

"I wasn't thinking of Jake," I told her. "I meant just love."

She laughed at me.

"Love don't come alone like that, Silly. It has to be mixed up with somebody or other. It starts all right, and then some night it just sort of comes over you that way,—how you're alive and he's alive and there you are, and tomorrow don't seem to matter."

She had never said so much to me before and we were both silent after her outburst.

"But what are you going to do,—afterwards?" I asked at last.

"There's a place where they take them in Portland and find homes to put them in. Ma thinks I'd oughtn't to, but I don't know, it might be better specially if it's a girl. Don't look at me

same's if I was talking murder, Kate. You're made different from me. You like doing for people and I don't."

We walked as far as the cross-roads together, talking of clothes and the summer cottages as if nothing had happened since last fall. But that night I thought over what she had said and tried to make it out. Sadie was on my mind a good deal the next busy weeks of summer along with other things.

It wasn't much past the first week of June before everyone knew that the Fortune ship-yard had been taken over by the bank and resold to a hotel syndicate. The deal was hardly put through before a gang of men were at work demolishing the old buildings. The Major refused to mention it and he let Henry Willis see to the whole affair. He sent him down with the wagon to bring up all the furnishings of the office. He vowed he would never go near the place again.

So the pictures of Fortune ships that I remembered from my first visit there came back to crowd The Folly walls. There were more than these could hold. I had to help carry some to the attic along with ship models and log books by the armful. It seemed as if there had been a death in the family, and I was thankful that Rissa would soon be home again. She came with the first blooms on the early Scotch rose-bushes. Her presence distracted the Major a little, though she was less at home than on her winter stay. I felt shy with her once more. She seemed more aloof and busy. Will Drake had a beautiful new sloop that summer that he kept anchored off Porcupine Head and she went sailing with him and his friends almost every pleasant day when she wasn't riding in his light apple-green wagonette with the bay horse.

I must confess that sometimes when I was doing odd jobs about the place and saw them drive off together, or when I watched the sails going up in the cove and heard the distant laughter and voices coming across the water, I felt lonely and left out. When Nat came in July it was harder because he often went along too. Till then he had not joined much in the summer doings. But now he had no tutor or studies to tie him and

Will Drake's young sister, Dora, had grown up very pretty with taking ways. I could hardly blame either of them for wanting to go over there to a house overflowing with young life and fun and easy ways after the quiet and gloom of The Folly. The Major made few objections to their absences. He was too low and preoccupied to bother with their comings and goings. He was proud to have Rissa sought after and anything that took Nat away from music he considered a blessing. He might scold about the new cottages as they multiplied, but he had to accept the Drakes and their money. Once he would have objected to a match between Rissa and Will Drake, but I think he was past that then. He seldom left the house and what exercise Fancy and Fanny got was when Nat or Rissa drove them on pleasure jaunts or George made his trips for mail and supplies.

"He's sold off another fifty acre piece of woodland," Jake reported to mother and me on one of the rare visits he made in mid-summer. "Some of his best timber's on it, over by Badger Pond."

"I hope he got a good price," mother said.

"Nothing to what a slice of his shore front would have brought. They say he's turned down three or four offers for that point across the Creek."

"He's got his own plans for that, I guess," I put in, remembering Rissa's remark of the winter before. "How are you coming along with the fish and lobster business?"

Jake was always eager to talk of his own affairs, and they were prospering. He had more customers than he could keep supplied and he was learning the trick of what they would buy at fancy prices.

"I give the boys seven cents apiece for their best lobsters," he explained. "But I can get fifteen and twenty cents for bringing 'em door to door. 'Twould be easier with a horse, but then I'd have his keep, this way it's clear profit and I have my afternoons for sailing parties. With luck I can pay up on that land by the end of the summer, if Hilda'd just hold off her wedding. Not that I expect her to be considerate."

Hilda had announced her intention of marrying Ed Phillips, the grocery salesman from Portland, and she meant to leave home ahead of Ruth. She generally got her way and her black eyes and pert tongue had taken Ed Phillips by storm.

"They've got nothing much to live on but hopes," Jake went on. "But Hilda's possessed to do it. She won't hear of putting in another winter here, same's she'd ought to."

"I can't blame her for that," mother admitted. "Sam's so cranky lately he'd drive anybody away."

"It'll come harder on me though, for Ruth don't bring in a cent. If Will Stanley had any gumption he'd start a decent store here and then he and Ruth could live home and contribute something. He'd do all right if he wasn't so scared to take the plunge."

"My goodness, Jake," I cried, "you've got plans for everybody, haven't you?"

"Well, I can see ahead. Things are on the boom here in Little Prospect. But it takes planning to get anywhere even with the tide. Folks that drift don't make much headway."

"I suppose not," I told him, "only for everyone that gets ahead it does seem somebody else gets shoved to the wall."

"It's their own fault. Don't you bother so much 'bout other people, Kate." Then as he rose to go and I followed him down to the boathouse, he grew more affectionate. "You just leave the worrying to me," he said, slipping an arm round my waist and swinging his lantern with the other. "I got a plan for tomorrow if your mother'll let you off. That cook over to Drake's wants a couple of quarts of good wild raspberries and there's plenty over by the Noyes place. Looks like fog to me with this east wind so I figured we could go over there and take our lunch and kind of look the place over together."

"All right, Jake, I'd like that and I guess mother can spare me."

Jake was a good weather prophet. It was just the soft, grey day he had predicted, a good one for berrying. He came for me as soon as he had emptied his dory of fish and lobsters, and it

seemed good to shed the house and kitchen and be out on the water in his old boat. The fog was light and the fine dampness on my face refreshed me. Jake, too, was in good spirits. He had sold out everything that morning and had been figuring profits in his head all the way over. It was a long row, but we had the day before us, so we kept close to shore to see how the new houses were going up. He pointed out the different ones to me and shouted and waved to the men at work on new roofs and chimneys.

"Seems to me they cut more trees there than they needed to," I said as we passed close to one on Spruce Point. "You'll promise not to chop down too many round our house." I reddened, hearing myself say that for the first time.

"Well, we'll see," he laughed and looked pleased at my calling it ours already. "Guess we won't start quarreling over trees yet awhile."

We could see the old Noyes house when we came round the point with its dark ranks of trees, a young thick-set growth that had taken the pasture and fields and came straight to the jutting rocks. The house had grown grey as granite and sat in the hollow of a steep field. From the water it looked almost like a square boulder some glacier had dropped there ages ago. The glass was gone from the gable windows and an overgrown lilac bush hid the doorway, but the chimney had been built against time and weather and stood up, proud and red from the green-filmed shingles. Staring at it, I felt a longing come over me to see woodsmoke climb up blue and straight from those bricks.

"We could kindle a fire in there," Jake spoke as if he had guessed my thought, "and fry our bacon and eggs. I brought an old spider along and a coffee pot."

"Yes," I agreed, "let's have our first meal there together."

Jake was in his element that day. I think I was never so happy with him before or since. We had a good hour before lunch time, so I went off to the berry picking while he tied the boat and carried up the things.

"Don't come till I whistle," he said when we parted, "I wouldn't want you to see it first without me."

The best raspberries grew in a great tangled patch below the field where daisies and devils-paint-brush and buttercups slanted down over the rough ground to a small pebbled cove. The sun had grown stronger though the fog still held beyond the easterly point of woods. I took off my hat and let it come warm on my hair. Devils-paint-brush was cursed by all the farmers, but I had always favored it from a child. It seemed to me that none I had ever seen before was so flaming as that in the field which would be ours someday. Looking off across it the small orange flowers were like thousands of copper nail-heads catching the light. The berries were thick and crimson,—"above rubies," I told myself as I picked, remembering a half-forgotten verse from the Bible. I only ate one of all I picked but that tasted warm and sweet with something of salt, too, from growing so near the water. My reddened finger tips smelled like all of summer and my basket was nearly full by the time I heard Jake's whistle.

The orchard of dwarfed apple trees was between me and the house, but I made out a thread of smoke at the chimney and knew Jake had kindled a fire. I had to stand still in my tracks and stare at it with my heart going fast. I had never had anything more than a chest and a dresser and my clothes to call my own before, and it came over me then that this was mine, or going to be someday,—the smoke and the apple trees and the house in the field, the daisies and devils-paint-brush and the raspberries in my basket. And Jake had made that fire for me. He had thought to do it all himself, and I felt very tender towards him as I went up the path.

"Well, you took your time," he greeted me at the front steps.

But he looked more pleased than he sounded. I guess he could tell from my face what was in my mind. I put down the berry basket and we went in together for the first time. He had been busy getting it ready for me. I saw a twig broom he had made to sweep away dust and broken window glass. A fire

of driftwood was burning in the hearth of the square parlor that faced the water. He had our lunch spread on an empty box and another for me to sit on, and the smell of coffee filled the place. Some barn-swallows had built a nest under the eaves just outside. Jake was all for clearing it away, but I wouldn't let him. I liked having them fly in and out of the broken windows without fear of us.

"Leave them be awhile longer," I begged him. "Mother says swallows bring bad luck to a house, but I could never believe it."

He humored me that day and we were happy there with our lunch and our plans. After we had eaten every crumb and drained the coffee pot he took me about to see all the sights. It was built on the pattern of all the old farms thereabouts; two square front rooms and two behind; low ceilings, and narrow stairs that led to a half-finished room above.

"We won't bother to fix that up yet awhile," he told me as we looked up to the rafters. "I can work on it winters and I guess it'll come in handy in a couple of years after we outgrow the downstairs bedroom."

He gave me a knowing look and I nodded my assent.

"They'll be pretty steep stairs, though," I pointed out.

"Not if I fix a handrail and put one of those gates at the top."

He looked pleased and embarrassed.

I thought of Sadie Berry and I thought of poor Bessie and her calf that was now a long-legged gangling thing in The Folly pasture, and I didn't trust myself to say more.

"The kitchen faces south," Jake was saying. "You'll get winter sun and a breeze in summer. I'll put the sink over there, and later maybe I can see my way to pump water in from the well. Those are nice cupboards for crockery."

"And I can see your boat coming round the point from that window."

"This'll be the bedroom," he led me to the last of the four. "The folks must have had the bed in the corner. See the marks in the floor boards."

"They had pretty paper once." I found a loose strip still hanging to the wall. "It had a little kind of vine pattern with blue flowers."

"We can have flowers here again," he promised. "Only I'm not for those big cabbage roses all over a wall, the kind Ruth and Hilda favor. They'd give me fits to wake up to."

We found a cracked willow-ware bowl in the cupboard and I made Jake dip up water from the well, so we could leave a nosegay on the parlor mantelpiece. There was a broken child's chair out in the shed and we brought it in by the fireplace.

"A little paint and new rungs and that'll be good's ever," he laughed.

"Who do you suppose it belonged to, Jake? It looks most a hundred years old."

"Lord, I don't know, some Noyes' young one most likely!"

I was suddenly silent thinking of the past and the other couples those walls must have sheltered. Queer that we two should be taking possession of all they had built without any thought of us. Such frail mementoes stayed to haunt an old house:—marks of a bed on floor boards, a scrap of flowered paper, a blue bowl, and a child's first chair, long since outgrown. I turned chill thinking about it and how we must all leave so little of ourselves behind.

"What you got so solemn for all of a sudden?" Jake questioned, drawing me close to his old coat that was warm with his body and stiff with sea salt.

"Oh, just that it's queer to be planning for a house built for some other pair to set up in years ago."

"Do those old stones over there make you gloomy?"

I followed his eyes to the point and a small space walled in by beach stones and holding six or seven headstones.

"I'll have 'em taken away and the place levelled over if you say so."

"Oh, no. I don't mind gravestones, Jake, the way some do. Let's go over and read the names on them."

We held hands, each glad of the other's warm fingers as we

went through the long grass. Old rose bushes and day lilies were tangled, covering some of the oldest stones.

*"Sacred to the memory of Amanda,
beloved wife of Asa Noyes,"*

We could just make out the words on the weathered stone,

*"May guardian angels watch
over her rest. June ye 17th, 1787."*

"That'll be a hundred years by next June," I whispered, awed at so great an age.

"There's one that's just rough pasture stone," Jake pointed out, "not slate or marble like the rest. Guess they had to make what they had do way off here in those days when anybody died. Couldn't fetch 'em away to any other burying ground then."

"I don't see how they made out, Jake, and yet they got married and had babies and cooked and planted flowers, too. I expect they were happy, same's we are now."

"Come on," he pulled away, "don't get mooning over a lot of old tombstones with folks that are nothing to either of us under 'em. We're alive and don't you forget it."

We kissed each other in a burst of affection and I went off for more raspberries. He puttered round the place till it was time to stow ourselves in the dory again.

"I kind of hate to go," he admitted as we had our last sight of the house before the peak of jutting trees came between. "I'd like to be all married and in it right now."

"Yes, it was nice there today. Kind of as if we belonged in it. I suppose we won't get another chance to come over all summer?"

"I put a padlock on the door," Jake went on. "I don't want any stray picnic-parties rummaging. 'Course it's just an old shell, but there's something to build on. I'm glad you took to it same's you did."

There was a deep-sea swell going back. We had to keep clear of the sharp-toothed ledges and their sudden jets of spray. The fog was slipping in as the sun grew lower, and Fortune's Folly

was a dim shape on the bluff among its spruces, the white columns pale threads and the cupola lost in blowing mist.

"You leave me by the bridge," I told Jake. "It's coming in thick so you'd better make a straight wake for home. It's been a lovely day and I shan't forget it."

I went up by the wood path, feeling tired and well content. Fog was in the upper branches and beaded spider webs made swaying triangles, like far, skeleton sails. The raspberries I had brought back sent up a wild spiciness, sweet to my senses, and music sounded from the east parlor as I turned into the drive. Nat was playing and I stopped in the hall to listen.

I couldn't see him from where I stood, but the whole place throbbed with his presence. It was all lovely and stirring sound. He played as he only played when he thought he was alone, and it seemed as I stood there that all the mahogany tables and chairs and sofas were alert and listening with me. I was never good at recognizing pieces of music. To this day I don't know whether it was his own or some other thing that he played. But it was his for the time being, I know that. I suppose the day had been a little too much for me and I was ready to be moved. That music made me feel that Fortune's Folly was already lost to me. The part of me that answered Nat's music didn't belong over in the old Noyes place. Those four plain rooms were no longer real to me. Only Nat and the torrent of sound that swept through The Folly rooms were real, and because I knew that I must learn to get on without them someday, I began to cry soundlessly into the curtain folds.

I hardly knew when he stopped playing. His voice at my side startled me.

"Why, Kate, I didn't know you were out there listening, and you're crying, too."

"It kind of set me off to hear you," I told him clumsily. "It does sometimes. Funny, when I don't know one note from another."

He held both my hands and his face looked old to me in the dimness of the big empty hall.

"No," he said gravely, "it isn't funny. Feeling things you can't explain isn't ever that,—it's Hell sometimes."

We had been brought up never to use that word. It startled me to hear it on his lips. His eyes were very dark. They seemed bottomless as I stared into them. His face was blurred through the last of my tears, but not his eyes. I can see them yet.

"I get frightened sometimes, Nat," I heard myself whisper.

"Sometimes I do, too." I could feel his fingers tighten on mine. "As if the years were black bats beating all round my head and getting closer,—" He broke off because I shivered. "Time's sort of terrible when you get thinking about it and then again you feel there couldn't ever be years enough no matter how old you lived to be."

Just then, before I could answer, the French enamel clock began to strike six from the mantelpiece. It came so strangely on his words that we both turned in the doorway to see the little woodsmen go through their familiar antics. The east parlor was dusky, but we felt, rather than watched them, saw away another hour with their precise, unhurried motions.

"You see, Kate," Nat pointed with his long forefinger, "it's nothing to them. They have to do it no matter what kind of an hour it's been or going to be for us."

"Oh, Nat, I didn't know you felt that way too? Maybe everybody does."

"No," he smiled slowly, "lots of people don't bother to notice." Then he went on in a different tone. "Do you remember those hammers at the launching?" I nodded. "Well, I keep dreaming about them. I did it again last night. You tried to tell me once that the men pounding the blocks away were like those two little woodsmen. I didn't think much of it then, but it's come back to me since, and you were right. There's a beat like that under everything, whether it's our hearts or the world turning in space. I can't put it in words, but I mean to in music someday."

I didn't try to answer him, for I knew he had gone a long

way off from me; though we stood so close together I could see the little vein in his throat that worked whenever he grew excited. I knew I had gone a long way, too, in those last few minutes. His words had carried me almost out of sight and sound of all that had held me fast since morning.

CHAPTER XVII

BEFORE August was past Hilda Jordan had been married to Ed Phillips and Sadie Berry's baby had come safely into the world. Both of these events are bound together in my mind because I managed a visit to Sadie and her son during the days I spent in Little Prospect, helping prepare for the wedding. Poor Cousin Martha was half-distracted with extra work, and Hilda busy at the store up to the last and Ruth too lazy and put-out by her sister's earlier marriage to bestir herself. Cousin Sam had slumped back into his old complaining, crippled state. The patent medicine he had been taking all summer only seemed to make him more fretful and demanding. Mother remarked on it with dire headshakes the Sunday before the wedding as we walked home.

"I told Martha she should dump that bottle out on the sly," she said. "But she said he'd only send off for another and they cost two dollars. He seemed to pick up some last fall, but he's slipping away now like a knotless thread."

I thought I knew why he had picked up last November, and I felt guilty as I always did remembering the fire.

"If I was Martha," mother went on, "I'd be most ready to take to the other kind of bottle to see me through this business. I told her I'd spare you tomorrow to help with those new curtains for the parlor. Ruth could do more if she had any mind to."

"She won't because Hilda's got ahead of her."

"I call it very small of her, and I gave her a piece of my mind this noon when you were out in the garden with Jake. But she just hunched her shoulders up and stuck out her lower

lip, that way she has. 'Look at Kate,' I says, 'you don't catch her moping off in corners because she and Jake have got to bide their time awhile yet.' I had a mind not to let you help 'em out, but there, I feel for Martha with such a pair on her hands."

I willingly flew at the sewing for the chance of a visit to Sadie and though the Jordans pressed me to stay for dinner I made excuse to do errands when noon came round. I had knitted a little jacket for the baby on the sly and fetched it in my work-bag to take her. The Berrys' small brown house beyond the store and post office looked more untidy than ever that day. Mrs. Berry was out in the back with an overflowing wash-basket and her mouth full of clothes-pins. She greeted me warmly with a flood of details I had not asked for.

"She had it easier'n I expected," she told me, "being built so small and the baby a hearty one. Eight pounds and a quarter, he is. Yes, she come off well considering. Doc Robbins couldn't have done more for anybody with a husband to show. I must say I didn't miss having one underfoot when her pains commenced, but I'd just like to get hands on that man for once, whoever he is. I'd squeeze a few dollars out of his pockets if nothing else. Well, it's a noble baby, and a boy which is one thing to be thankful for in this parcel of women."

I left her still talking and went in to the back room. Sadie was lying on a tumbled bed with her five day old son in the crook of her arm. I sat down beside her and thought how young and pretty she looked,—like a little girl in her cambric night-gown and braids of yellow hair. The baby appeared anything but noble to me as he slept with tight-screwed eyelids and wrinkled brows. He made me think more of the stone Buddha in The Folly garden than anything human and I stared at him, fascinated by the resemblance.

"He's the first real young one I ever saw." I reached out a timid finger to touch his clenched red fist. "He seems most too small to be alive."

"He's plenty alive." Sadie gave a faint laugh. "You'd ought to hear him when he wakes up hungry." She drew him closer

with a gesture that startled me, coming from Sadie who was always so quick and careless. "You're the only one of all the girls that's been over," she went on. "I thought you'd come. How'd you work it?"

"Oh, I managed. I guess mother'll come round pretty soon. She likes babies. Tell me, was it worse than you thought it would be?"

"It don't seem real now. Mother thought I had it easy and she ought to know. Doc Robbins gave me something to smell along at the last, but I didn't care much by then."

The baby's fist had opened and closed on my finger. I marvelled at the grip of anything so soft.

"My, he can tug. He's strong."

"He'd better be. Guess he'll need all he's got."

"People forget real easy, Sadie. What are you going to call him?"

"Orion," she said with pride. "I got it out of a book about the stars. I wanted something out of the ordinary. He's got a hard road to hoe and there's a lot in having names different from everybody else. I read that, too, in some paper."

I felt sorry for the baby saddled with such an outlandish name. I knew how the boys would josh him about it when he started going to school. But Sadie was so pleased I hadn't the heart to argue it out of her. She was childish enough to try the jacket on, and in doing so woke him to lusty crying. His mouth yawned like a young bird's, and his milky-blue eyes looked old and wise when they were not screwed fast with the struggle of his roars.

"Guess I'd better feed him or he'll have us both deaf," Sadie said when all soothing failed. She hoisted him to her breast in a way that surprised me. It seemed hard to believe that Sadie was nursing a baby of her own. It awed me to see her. "He'll quiet down now," she said, and presently the room was still except for her mother's thumps and swashings from the kitchen beyond.

The baby looked more young and tender pressed to the

whiteness of her skin. His cheeks grew crimson and the fine, dark down of his head seemed to bristle with the effort of his sucking. I could almost feel the warm weight of him against my own body and I felt again what had made me cry when I had seen Bessie try to lick her calf. So I left them together and hurried back through the noon-time stillness of the village. But all that afternoon as I sewed and hung yards of flowery cotton print, I couldn't get that bed and those two out of my mind. When Jake came in at six to take me back in his boat, I ran and kissed him, right before them all. He looked pleased and bewildered and I couldn't help trying to picture how he had looked when he was a round-headed baby, and how it would be if we ever had one of our own.

By another week Hilda was married and off to Portland in a new brown mohair made with as stylish puffed sleeves and draped skirt and bustle as any the summer people wore. She had a hat with stiff red wings that met in front and looked ready to fly off her head at the first breeze. We all made a day of it, though Jake had to be up before daylight to get his fish deliveries through by ten. He wore his best blue suit and his shoes squeaked every step he took. We stood side by side all through the ceremony in the Jordan parlor and he squeezed my hand tight when Reverend Chase pronounced them man and wife. I knew he was thinking how it would be when our turn came to stand up together that way.

Mother and I stayed till after dark helping with all the stacked up dishes Cousin Martha and Ruth had on their hands, and Will and Jake moved the parlor furniture back from the woodshed. I saw them sitting out by the well, smoking their pipes and talking very deep and earnest together and I guessed they were going over some of those plans Jake had been mulling over all summer. I had never felt much affection for Hilda and all her smart talk and ways, but I must say I missed her that evening. Her going was the first change in that household and I felt as if more were crowding in upon us. I was glad to get back to The Folly again, with everything there just as

we had left it that morning. Rissa was off on a late picnic, and the greenish light from the student lamp came through Nat's half open door. A fat envelope with foreign stamps lay unopened on the hall table awaiting Rissa's return. I knew the writing for Dick Halter's and it struck me that his letters had been more frequent of late. I wondered if he had come to mean more to Rissa. I missed him and wished he would come back to The Folly again. He was so wise with all his kind pleasantness that I thought I could have told him a lot that was on my mind.

It was September before I learned the reason for those foreign letters.

Rissa's twenty-first birthday came the first week of fall and though Nat's trunk stood open in the upper hall he would not have left before that day. That year there was no reception to mark the anniversary, but Major Fortune had not forgotten her coming of age. Gifts were by her place at the dinner table that noon,—a pair of beautiful old fashioned bracelets and a brooch that had been her mother's; an ivory backed brush and mirror with her initials from Henry Willis; a leather writing case from Philadelphia and a mother of pearl and silver pen from Nat. Mother and I had made handkerchiefs in a satin case, and another envelope had arrived from Dick Halter with a sketch and a bit of real lace folded inside. Dinner was hardly touched while we all watched her open them. It was after two when they rose from the table.

"I have another gift for you in the safe, Rissa," I heard the Major say on their way out. "It's been a long time waiting for you to come of age, and it won't be a surprise to you, I guess."

I saw her glance back over her shoulder at Nat who had lingered by the window overlooking the garden with its russet and crimson and gold dahlia balls. Her lips gave no sign as she went with her father, but there was more pink than usual in her cheeks and the fine brown curls on her forehead seemed stirred as if by some secret expectancy. Something had passed between them. Nat stayed behind. I saw his thin fingers toy uneasily with the window shade as he leaned there in the September sun-

shine. I wanted to speak to him, for we seldom had a chance to be alone. But I dared not break into his thoughts, whatever they were.

"But, father," I heard Rissa's voice come clearly across the hall a moment later, "don't put it right away again. What's the harm if I keep it in my desk just for a day or two. In there with all your papers it doesn't seem like mine."

"What a child you are still," the Major chided her indulgently. "I suppose I'll have to humor you on your birthday. It's in your name anyway. But don't leave it around loose even for a day. I've had trouble enough to hang on to this parcel of land for you."

Presently she came back to the dining-room. I saw her through the pantry door as she sped to Nat with a folded paper in her hands.

"It's the deed, Nat," she spoke very low and excited. "It's mine now,—see, here's my name."

They bent over it together at the window, his dark head beside hers that glinted golden. A spoon clattered on one of the saucers I was piling and they both started and began to make different talk. They had forgotten me till then and I went back to the kitchen hurt and troubled for what I couldn't name, not even to myself. They were off together all that afternoon, and at supper time I felt things stirring between them. Rissa was very gay. She still kept her flush and her eyes shone in the soft oval of her face. The Major couldn't keep his eyes away from her and even near-sighted Henry Willis remarked on her looks.

"Twenty-first birthdays agree with you, Rissa," he smiled at her. "I'd advise you to stay this age a good while."

The Major poured out glasses of sherry all round to drink her health, one for me, too. I stood with mine behind her chair while the Major rose to propose the toast.

"Your health, my dear," he said with formality, "and many more happy returns of the day with us altogether under this old roof."

We clinked our glasses while Rissa sat there very still and a

little grave as we drank the Major's wishes down. She had scarcely touched a mouthful, but only I noticed that in the festivity of the meal.

Next morning at the breakfast table Nat announced that he had decided to leave that afternoon, nearly a week ahead of his plans. He said Will Drake had asked him the day before to go along with him and he would have a chance to drive over and take the train from Rockland. I expected an outcry from Rissa at his cutting his stay short, yet only the Major complained.

"I don't know why you want to go by train," he said. "But you always did take every chance you could to steer clear of boats. It's a week before college opens, isn't it?"

"Yes, father," Nat admitted, "but I'm changing my room and there are things I need to see to beforehand."

"Well, go along then," his father dismissed it with a preoccupied frown, "but you needn't depend on the Drakes to drive you over. I've got business of my own to see to in Rockland and I can just as well make it today if you'll be ready to start in two hours. You can stand a ride with me for once, I guess."

I could tell that Nat much preferred the other way, but he dared not make further objection. Getting his things packed and carried downstairs on such short notice kept us all busy and the house was one continual bustle till they drove off. I couldn't believe he was gone so quickly, not even when I heard the last clatter of the horses over the bridge, and knew he was on his way.

"I must say," mother began when I joined her to do the belated breakfast dishes, "it was real thoughtless of Nat to rush off on a minute's notice like that. But men are alike, helpless as children and inconsiderate as the weather."

"It always seems as if winter's here when Nat leaves," I sighed. "He never started this soon before. I guess I'd better go up and fix his room."

His hasty departure had driven everything else from my mind, even the deed and Rissa's odd behavior of the day before.

I felt only heaviness and low spirits as I went about removing the signs of his late presence. He had taken all but his oldest clothes and even the better part of his books had gone off in a wooden box. Only one thing puzzled me. He had left the picture of Rissa, taken two years before in Philadelphia, in its place on the mantelpiece. It had gone with him to college last year and I knew he set store by it.

"He went off in such a rush he forgot it most likely," I decided.

I had half a mind to pack it and send it off then and there. But I thought Rissa would want to do that. She might resent my blundering in. So I went back downstairs to my work.

About an hour after dinner she called me out of the kitchen. I was startled to see her in her best green mohair, the one she seldom wore at The Folly. She had her hat with the green ostrich feathers on, too, and her brown dolman was over her arm. I must have looked my surprise for she was very short with me.

"Kate," she said, "I wonder if you'd row me over to the Drakes' place and bring the boat back?"

"Why, yes," I agreed, wondering more than ever at her asking such a thing. "I guess mother can spare me awhile, but how'll you get yourself back without the boat?"

She caught her lower lip in a way she had when she was annoyed.

"I'm going to spend the night there," she hurried on. "I wasn't sure this morning, so I couldn't explain to father. But I've left him a note. He and Henry Willis won't be back till after supper they said."

I felt uneasy, though I dared not question her.

"But I thought the Drakes were all going on the afternoon train," I reminded her, "I'm sure Nat said all of them."

"You must have heard him wrong. It was only Will and Mr. Drake and I want to see them before they leave. Do hurry, Kate, I wish you wouldn't stand there making objections. I

don't often ask favors of you, though I notice you're ready enough if Nat asks one."

"Of course I'll take you," I said a little stiffly. "I'll tell mother where I am and meet you at the boathouse."

When I got down there I was more surprised and mystified to see she had another bag beside her little one, far too heavy a valise for her to have carried down. I could hardly lift it in, but she made no comment. As I bent to the oars all the misgivings I had had those last two days began to take shape in one tremendous dread.

"Rissa," I spoke when we were halfway across the stretch of water, "I wish you'd tell me what's up, for I know something is."

She bit her lips again and tapped an impatient tattoo with her fingers on the seat.

"Don't start making mountains out of mole-hills, Kate," she answered. "I should think you could row me half a mile without a lot of questions."

Her words were like flint to me. They cut me clear to the quick.

"Well, I'm rowing you there." I pulled so hard at the oars I gave us both a dash of salt water. "But I'm not such a fool as you think. I can see as far into a stone wall as the next one."

That was a favorite phrase of mother's and I caught at it in my hurt bewilderment. My eyes were fixed on the bags between us in the bottom of the boat. She knew as well as I what was in my mind.

"It's nothing to you," she said, and her eyes had turned slate-grey under her straight fair brows. "I don't have to ask you about every plan I make,—or anyone else now."

"Rissa," I went on rowing steadily, "you ought to know I'm not one to meddle with your doings, only you and Nat and I've been so close always, it seems as if I've got a right to know something. You're not going to run off and marry Will Drake or anything like that?"

She gave a low, queer laugh that I didn't like the sound of. "Marry Will Drake? Whatever put that in your head?"

"Then it's about that deed. You acted kind of queer after he gave it to you, and last winter you know you said——"

"I don't remember anything I might have said," she cut in. "I tell you I just want to go over and say good-bye. Goodness knows, I wouldn't have bothered you if father hadn't taken the horses. Nat could have gone with the Drakes just as well as not, the way we planned it. Then there needn't have been all this talk and fuss!"

She hunched up her shoulders and stared past me stonily from her place in the stern seat. I knew it was no use to go on. Her face had fallen into grim lines, like the Major's own. For all her curls and soft color she looked like granite to me that day. I could have beaten myself to bits on her before I could have got past the wall she had raised between us.

So I went on pulling dully at the oars and neither of us spoke till we came alongside the wooden landing. My heart seemed to sag right in me when she got out and I handed over her things.

"They'll send someone down for the bags," she said, "you don't have to wait." Then she hesitated as if something in her was trying to break through and speak to me. "Thank you for bringing me over," she said and her voice sounded less chilly. "I'm—I'm sorry if I was short with you, Kate, and if father asks you anything, you just tell him I asked you to row me over here and you did, that's all."

I watched her go up the steep path with little running steps. In another moment her green dress was swallowed up by the crowding trees. When I was halfway back I saw someone come down to the landing and carry the bags away. My hands felt numb as I gripped the oars and put the water between us. I suspected something but not that it would be nearly three years before I set eyes on her again.

Major Fortune and Henry Willis had said they might be late returning from Rockland, for they had business errands to

attend to going and coming. Mother was very tired after the extra work of getting Nat off, so we left a cold supper spread out in the dining-room and went to our rooms unusually early. I was all stirred up over Rissa's behavior and mother's questions about her spending the night away from home only made me more troubled. I lay broad awake in the darkness long after I knew she was asleep in the next room, my ears strained for the sound of the horses on the bridge. It was like waiting for a thunderstorm to break when the air has been heavy for hours.

I shall never forget the call when it came. I flung on my wrapper and hurried out with mother, who made sleepy complaints as we felt our way down stairs. Although I had been so wide-awake I blinked in the light that met me in the lower hall, and it must have been a minute or so before the Major's face grew clear. They had finished their supper and Bo still had a dish in his black hands.

"What's wrong, Major?" I heard mother asking behind me.

He did not answer her but reached out and caught the hand I had laid on the newel post.

"What do you know about this, Kate?" His voice had a hollow sound as if it came out of an empty room. "Tell me if you know where Rissa is?"

My heart was suddenly still after all its earlier poundings. I felt quiet, the way a chip looks caught in the center of a whirlpool.

"Why I rowed her over to the Drakes' place," I told him. "Right after dinner, it was. She said she was going to stay the night there and she'd left you word."

His eyes were boring into mine. But the sheet of notepaper he had been holding fluttered to the carpet. I remember it fell right in the middle of one of the big roses where the threads had begun to show through the pattern.

"Get the horses out again, Bo." He said without letting go of my hand. His fingers were like cold metal on mine. "Kate Fernald," he went on, "if you're not telling me all you know, —if you're keeping anything back—"

"Oh, Major," Mother broke in, "she is. Kate, speak up and say what it's all about if you know."

"She just asked me to row her over to the Drakes," I repeated. "I thought it was queer to take her big bag and the other one for just one night."

He dropped my hand with a groan. It seemed to me that the sound came out of the floor instead of his throat. I thought he would go down like one of the big spruces when the roots give way. He would have, I think, if Henry Willis hadn't taken his arm and got him back to the study and a glass of brandy.

I ran to the upstairs window and strained my eyes between the trees. But there wasn't a single light on Porcupine Head though I could make out the bulk of the big house. It was only half past nine and their lights always showed till much later. When I came down again I could hear Henry Willis trying to talk sense to the Major.

"Pull yourself together, Nathaniel," he was saying, though his own voice shook, "it's no time to go to pieces. There's a chance we can overtake them even if they have got a head start. Take another drink and we'll decide what's best to do."

The answer came so low I couldn't hear it. Mother was still at the stairs, an old shawl over her nightdress and her cap half off. She had picked up the letter and was reading it, her lips moving over the words. She held it out to me in silence.

"Dear Father,

"I know you will be very angry at what I am doing and I want you to know it was my idea and not Nat's, so blame me the most. I am taking that deed of my land to Boston this afternoon when I go down with Nat and the Drakes. I mean to sell it and use whatever it brings for Nat to study music abroad. We are taking the first steamer we can get. Even if you try to stop Nat because he isn't twenty one I will manage somehow, so please don't try. I know you have meant to be good to me according to your lights, but you almost killed Nat once and you will try to again, so this is the only way.

I am sorry to go against you like this and I hope you will not be

too hard on us, especially Nat. But nothing matters except for him to have his chance and you would never let him.

Your loving daughter,
Clarissa.

P.S. Please do not blame Kate. She had nothing to do with it."

Mother and I stared at each other when I had laid the letter on the hall table.

"Well, I always said she was a cold one," she told me, "but I wouldn't have believed she'd go that far. It's a mercy she put that part in about you or we'd never have got the Major to believe you didn't help 'em."

I couldn't tell her that it hurt me more that I hadn't been let in. I knew it was cruel and grim and hard of Rissa, but I didn't reproach her. Only it meant that the old bond between the three of us was gone and I rebelled at being pushed out of the old relationship. They no longer needed me. I was left on shore while they took to the wider waters. The rope of circumstance that had bound us so firmly in childhood had been wearing thin of late years. I had known that and had clung harder to the remaining strands as I had felt them loosening. Well, they had broken, clean and complete, and the gulf was growing between us with every tick of the clock. Terrible loneliness and despair choked me then, though my eyes were dry, where mother's brimmed over.

We dared not go in to the Major. Bo had driven over to the Drakes' place and what word we got came from Henry Willis.

"The thing he can't get over is that if he'd stayed to see Nat off he could have stopped them," he told us. "He says it's a judgment on him for putting his business affairs ahead of the boy. Yes, we left him there a good two hours ahead of train time. He said he didn't want us to wait. I can see now he'd have been pretty well upset if we had. Well, it's a bad business, a bad business."

"There must be some way to stop 'em," mother insisted.
"What do you plan to do?"

"I've been looking up steamers, and I'm afraid we don't stand a chance to. 'The Baltic' makes a call for passengers at Boston tomorrow afternoon,—no, it's midnight now,—that's today. I figure Rissa won't try to sail from New York or Philadelphia if she can take that. She must have laid her plans a long while back, counting on her birthday and all."

"Trust her," mother put in.

"Of course," Henry Willis went on, "there's a chance she might be held up with that deed. But the company in Boston that took over the ship-yard property is known to be buying up sites in this neighborhood. If she'd been in touch with them, and it wouldn't surprise me if she had, they'd have everything ready to put through without a hitch. There's no legal way to stop her selling it. It's in her name."

"I suppose it would fetch a lot of money?" I ventured.

"They'll beat her down if they can. Being a young girl and needing ready cash she isn't likely to dicker with them. There's a noon train and that's the best I can do. The Major's in no state to go and if I can reach them I think I stand a better chance of bringing them round."

"Always fire and water between that pair and the Major," mother was going on, "and you can't douse a fire forever. I won't go so far's to say he was always in the right,—not with the boy anyhow. But he's their father and I don't hold with breaking hearts in no such fashion."

I couldn't help thinking that Rissa's heart and the Major's were made of the same stuff and that only one as flinty as his own could have made any dent in it.

"Well, it's a bad business," Henry Willis kept on repeating as he drank the coffee we had made. "I've put through some pretty tough times with the Fortunes, one way and another and my father did before me, but this is more than I feel equal to, Mrs. Fernald, and I don't mind saying so."

She sent me in later with a cup of coffee for the Major. I

found him alone at his desk and he scarcely looked up when I set it down beside him. But as I was slipping away he called me back.

"Kate," he said, "I want you to put your right hand on the Bible and swear you've told me all you know of this—this business."

I had never been called on to do such a solemn thing, but I didn't waver.

"I swear I don't know a thing more than what I told you," I repeated, my hand on the worn, calfskin covers.

I wanted to go, but still he kept me there. He stared at me intently as if he had not seen me for twenty years, instead of every day.

"You're a foursquare girl," he said slowly. "A grown woman, almost. Do you blame me for what's come to pass?"

If Jubilee Mountain itself had spoken out to me I couldn't have been more startled by the question. I stood silent beside him, knowing that the chance had come to pay him back for all the childish hurts and dreads he had given me. All the looks and words and injustices I had felt in those years at Fortune's Folly seemed to swarm up like a hive of bees in me. Yet the haggard lines of his face and the sag of his body, bereft of the pride that had buoyed it up so long, overwhelmed me with a new and sudden pity. The moment had come, yet I could no longer take satisfaction in it. I saw he waited anxiously for any crumb of comfort I might throw him.

"Well," I said at last, and even feeling for him as I did I could not put away the memory of Nat's peaked, despairing face as it had looked between his father and Captain Mac Murty the night before the "Rainbow" set off on her first voyage. "Well, Sir, I think I'd have done the same as Rissa if I'd had the chance to give Nat what he wanted."

I saw a ripple of inner pain pass over his face, before it stiffened again.

"You stand there and tell me I didn't do what was best for my own son?"

His voice was firm as ever, but I caught something agonized and bewildered in it. He was asking for bread, and I knew I had only a stone to give him.

"Maybe it was best for you," I said without moving, "but not for him."

"I've heard about the hardness of youth," he spoke bitterly. "Now I know it!"

"You wanted to toughen Nat," I reminded him. "You said so when you sent him off to sea. Well, you did and you pretty near killed him into the bargain. I'm sorry, Sir,—" He winced so plainly I couldn't put the whip-lash of memory to him again. "I'm sorry, but you asked me, and—and there it is."

I got out of the study as fast as I could. For hours afterward I couldn't help feeling that I had pushed a man overboard and watched him go down without lifting a hand to throw him a rope. But I thought of the three of us, too, huddled round the piano, and all the other times as well. The old scores were paid now, I told myself. We were free of him at last in our separate ways. I could pity him and do for him now that I had had my say.

PART III

CHAPTER XVIII

THE months following that night are confused to me as they were at the time. I know that the clockwork of days went on as usual at The Folly. Horses were fed and the cows milked; apples and winter vegetables gathered and stored; meals were cooked and eaten; beds made and fires tended, and time's little woodsmen went tirelessly in and out of their door.

By late September it was common gossip in Little Prospect and along the coast that Rissa and young Nat Fortune had shaken off their father and The Folly to go their own way in far parts. Henry Willis had guessed right. He had missed them by a few hours. Rissa's land was gone, too, and all his offers to buy it back were refused. The Company that had taken it were holding the shore frontage at unbelievably high prices, and the wood acres had been sold to a lumber concern. The work of cutting the trees would be begun by another spring. Only the season spared them to us for a little longer.

I used to stand at the upper windows overlooking the land on either side of the Creek and try to imagine that far shore without its woods. When the sharp first frosts of October came and birches were yellower than lilies, and rock maples like pillars of fire in the thick green of firs and pines and spruces, it seemed that I must go out crying to them of advancing axes; as if I must run along their ranks to give warning against their enemy. Maybe it was only my sharpened senses and my dread of change that made me feel the trees were outdoing themselves that fall. A kind of bright doom was upon every colored leaf, every glistening needle, and cone. The sight would draw me out a score

of times a day and each long look I gave was like a screw put to my heart.

I wondered if Rissa ever gave them a thought, or Nat. But I guessed not in their first months of freedom. Although no letters had come I felt sure that they had joined forces with Dick Halter. I had his Paris address and I decided to put my pride in my pocket and write them in his care. I spent many hours concocting that letter. I cannot recall the words that cost me such labor, but I told them I must have news and that I had stood up for them against the Major. I begged Rissa to try and stop the laying waste of the woods. Not that I thought she could do anything, but because I must set my hope, however forlorn, on paper. At the end, I remember, I tried to tell them I could never blame them for anything they did, only I wished they had seen fit to tell me beforehand, and I begged them to write me for the sake of old times.

It was natural, I think, that I should have turned to Jake then as I hadn't before. He seemed so sure and dependable to me that I clung to him, the way I did to familiar islands and headlands. We had words over Rissa and Nat whenever I took sides with them against the opinion of all Little Prospect. But on the whole he was considerate.

"Your ma says you're all on edge," he told me after one long argument, "and I'm to make allowances. Maybe you think I have it easy, overhauling summer boats and trying to pick up what I can with lobsters and fish? I've got worries of my own without you snap my head off too."

"I'm sorry, Jake. Is it Cousin Sam again?"

"Yes, he's failing all the time. I used to think he put it on to get Martha to do for him, but now I guess he won't last through the winter."

"He's been down other times and picked up."

"I can't say I'll mourn him much," Jake admitted. "He never done for me more'n he could help and he begrimed Martha taking me in. Still, if he goes, you know what I'll have on my hands."

"You mean that little pension he gets will stop?"

"Yes, and the girls won't help any."

"There's Will Stanley. Maybe when he and Ruth get married——"

"He hasn't saved much and I'll have to stand behind him if he starts that store here. He ought to by next summer or somebody else will. Anyway I can figure it looks as if our plans are off for awhile."

"Maybe if we wrote to Hilda now she'd spare a little cash?"

"Likely chance. You and me are the ones it'll come on. You'll see."

October yellows and scarlets dulled into November russets and ashy maroon, and then into dun and rusty brown. Every Sunday on our visits mother and I saw that Cousin Sam Jordan was losing ground. He made me think of a left over apple on a wintry bough. The only times he showed a spark of his old spirit would be if mother mentioned Major Fortune's low state of mind, and how the pride had been knocked clean out of him.

"Serves him right," he would croak from his corner by the stove, "Serves him right to get left high'n dry, with his ships and his family on the rocks. I've lived to see the start of his break up, and that's some satisfaction, even if I can't hold out to see it through."

"Now, Sam, remember what the Doctor said and don't get worked up," Cousin Martha would urge. "You don't want to bring on another poor spell."

The Major, after that first night, refused to speak of the calamity. He might have thrown himself into the business, if there had been any left for him to attend to. But there was little to take him away from the house and the big leather mail-bag that used to be stuffed full when Bo or George fetched it from the village looked lean as an old horse. By late November he hardly went out except for church. His days were spent reading the books on his own shelves. The Bible seemed to hold him most often. I would see him bent over it, mumbling over passages and penciling the margin wherever some verse had caught

his interest. It gave me a pang to see him so. Somehow it wasn't like him to hang on the Prophets as he seemed to. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah, he was always over them, though he appeared to take some comfort in Job's trouble and King David's laments.

"Too bad the Major and Sam Jordan are at such outs," mother often remarked, "they'd enjoy comparing troubles. Pity they can't pool their misfortunes,—'twould be company for 'em."

Henry Willis did his best to distract his old friend, but he knew too well what was on his mind. Still, I don't know what we should have done without him at The Folly. Sometimes he and mother and I had long talks together in the kitchen and through him we learned more fully the state of Fortune affairs.

"We must pare down every way it's possible to," he told us. "It's only fair you should know he has about half the money he had coming in last year, and that was a third of what it was the year before. Figures don't lie and I've been going over the books lately."

"I thought he could always sell off more land to tide him over," mother looked grave.

"That's what he's been doing the last eight or nine years,—against my advice a good many times. He hung on to the ship-yard when he should have let it go and kept his timber land instead. He always hoped shipping would come back,—his kind of shipping, I mean. That land he gave Rissa was about the last valuable tract he had left. This place is clear still, and that's something. I don't want to worry you. I know you do your best, Mrs. Fernald."

"Kate and I'll do everything we can. We try to be thrifty, but it's saved at the spiggot, wasted at the bunghole, same as in most places."

"I know. I know." Henry Willis sighed and brought out his wallet. "I came to bring you your quarter's wages. Kate ought to have something, too, now she's taken on so much of the work."

"Never mind me," I put in from the pantry.

"That's right," Mother assured him, "we'll manage. The

Major was always generous to me when he had it, and Kate's got a comfortable place to be in till she marries. I'd sooner take nothing and stay on here together."

"It's not a question of that yet," he laid the money on the table beside her, "Lean times come to every one now and then."

"Yes, even to Fortune's." Mother nodded. "I was afraid you might leave us when the ship-yard was taken over."

"I'm too old a dog to learn new tricks," he sounded sad in spite of his precise smile, "I could see change setting in ahead of the Major, that's the only difference between us. I needn't ask you not to mention this. No good to start idle gossip. And you're not to be worried," he added as he went to the door, "I've got some of my own put by in case it's needed."

"I don't hardly like to take this," mother said after he was gone. "'Twouldn't surprise me if this came out of his own pocket. Well, I'll put it in the bank. It may be the last ready cash I see for awhile and I don't want you to go to Jake empty-handed."

"There's no hurry about that from what Jake says," I reminded her.

"Of course," she went on, "the Major'd ought to let Bo go. But how can he? A poor old black man like that can't get anything else to do and he's no folks but us. I guess it's for you and me to scrimp."

Just before Christmas the mail brought me an envelope with foreign stamps and Rissa's handwriting. There was another for the Major, but I have no notion if he read or answered it. I carried mine to the east parlor and read it alone behind the damask curtains. It is still here in the little packet I have always kept.

"November 17th, 1886

Dear Kate,

I was glad to have your letter and know that you were not hard on me for going off the way I had to. Nat wanted to tell you, but I was afraid to let anyone else in, except Dick Halter. I hope father didn't blame you after he found out. I hope maybe he will come around,

though he wrote a terrible letter and said he would never feel the same to either of us again. But we are so happy, nothing like that seems to matter.

We had a fine crossing, only twelve days to Liverpool, and then we stopped in London and bought some things before we crossed the Channel. Dick met us in Calais and helped us find a sort of boarding house here, only they call it a Pension. He and another artist have a studio nearby and Nat has one, too, where he can practice all hours of the day or night. His teachers think he is a genius, but they wish he could have come younger.

Paris is the loveliest place! Much better than Philadelphia or New York or Boston. I am learning to speak French and Dick takes us around to all sorts of places. I have been to the Louvre and the palaces and we took long drives in the Bois before it turned cold. Sometimes we go to plays and the opera. I was never so happy in my whole life, and I only hope my money will hold out for us to stay till Nat is a famous composer.

Dick has just come in and says to tell you he is painting better than two years ago and that he is looking out for us. He sends his best remembrances. I hope your mother is well and George and Annie, and that father will get over minding about us.

Your affectionate friend,

Clarissa Fortune".

Nat had added a few lines on a half-sheet of paper.

"Dear Kate,

Rissa has told you all the news about us. I am studying hard, but it seems like fun to do just what I want. I have been writing some short pieces, mostly about the woods and sea and things I remember from Little Prospect. It's queer, as soon as I get away I always want to do music about it. I miss you and Frisky, but I guess you would feel pretty cramped in Paris except for the Luxembourg Gardens where the French children play and sail their boats. Yesterday by the river I passed an old blind man with a dog like Frisky leading him. It made me homesick and I gave them a franc. Give her a pat and a cooky for me and write us again. It is queer to be so far away and so happy,

Love from

Nat."

Happiness fairly ran out between the words Nat and Rissa had set on the paper. I could feel it, almost warm under my fingers, as I folded the foreign sheets. The winter sea was gray and endlessly tossing beyond the east window. Thousands of salty miles were between the three of us then, and yet I felt nearer to those two than I had of late. For the first time in months I went over the piano, which had seemed almost like a tombstone to me. Something made me raise the lid and lay my hand on the black and ivory keys, though I struck no note being fearful of the pain such a sound would give the Major. The keys felt cold to my touch. It was like being by a brook, frozen fast in winter, but with a far pulse of running water under the ice. Nat would return to break the coldness and silence; living waters of sound would rush under his fingers again. I knew it with deep certainty.

Christmas passed like any other day except for the drive to church over the iron-hard road. It was not a white winter as the one before had been. There was only a wind that cut like a cracked whip from the water. We sat together in the Fortune pew,—the Major and Henry Willis and mother and I, and my mind wandered to far away Paris when it should have been on Bethlehem in Judea. When we rose for the last hymn and Miss Ada Joy started playing “O Come All Ye Faithful” on the organ I couldn’t join in with the rest for thinking of how Nat had twisted the words around on our walk a year ago.

“‘*O come all ye faithful*,’—that’s you, Kate,” he had said, “‘*Joyful and triumphant*,’—that’s me!”

It seemed almost as if he must have known how it was going to be, for there was I, faithful to The Folly, and there was he, joyful and triumphant all those miles away.

“Merry Christmas, Jake,” I whispered as we met on the church porch after it was over.

He smiled in a preoccupied way and when Mother joined us he brought bad news of Cousin Sam.

“He’s had another sinking spell,” he told us as we walked

back to the Jordan place together. "But he's set his heart on hanging on till the New Year comes in."

Christmas wasn't over merry there, though Jake and I had a short time to ourselves when Ruth went over to Will Stanley's and mother spelled Cousin Martha off in the sickroom. Jake was pleased with the new gloves I had knitted him and showed it more than was common for him. He brought out a little ring for me that had belonged to his mother.

"Martha had it put away," he explained, "and I'd like for you to wear it. It's not like Ruth's or Hilda's store ones, but it's real gold and the stone's a garnet."

I was happy and told him so.

"I'd lots rather have it than a new one. It's the first I ever had on any finger."

Cousin Sam had his wish. He lingered into mid-January. Jake came over the morning after he died and we had a few words together while mother got her things on to go back with him.

"How was it along at the last?" I asked curiously.

"He just kind of let go and slipped off. But before that while Martha was getting something to ease him he got talking to me, kind of wild and mixed-up. Seemed as if he was trying to tell me something on his mind?"

"Was it about the 'Rainbow'?"

"I couldn't make out, only he did say, 'I don't mind going now I've paid up old scores.' 'What kind of scores?' I says, trying to pin him down. 'I've paid for water with fire,' he says, 'fire's good when you can make it work for you. I had a long wait, but 'twas worth it.' Then he kind of got mumbling and I didn't want to egg him on after Martha came back."

"And now he's gone and we'll never know for sure. It's a queer kind of secret for you and me to keep."

To our surprise Major Fortune insisted upon attending the funeral.

"He was an able man, and helped launch Fortune vessels,"

he said. "He was hurt through no fault of mine and he bore me a grudge. But I can overlook old scores now he's gone."

It seemed more than strange to hear the same words on his lips that had been on Cousin Sam's. I couldn't get over thinking about it as we all stood by his grave and heard the solemn Bible words that Reverend Chase was reading out. Winter burials were always bleak and difficult. It had taken dynamite to blast out a grave from earth that was harder than solid stone. Jake had spoken for me when he had said he couldn't mourn Cousin Sam Jordan, yet I was shaken to the core by the fact of death itself.

"For man's days are as grass, as a flower of the field so he flourishest, but the wind passeth over it, and it is gone and the place thereof shall know it no more."

The words of the Psalmist swept through me like a cold wind. I looked off at the ridge of Jubilee Mountain, black against a wrack of sun-edged clouds. I heard the sea's far boom on the outer reefs, and the bell tolling off on Old Horse Ledges. All were familiar sights and sounds to me, as they had been to Cousin Sam, whom they no longer concerned.

Major Fortune stood nearby, wrapped in his coat with the fur collar. He had uncovered his head with the rest of the men, and I noticed for the first time how grey he had grown, even his whiskers had hardly a thread of brown. He was all gray like the pasture boulders, and something about the set of his jaw and the way he stared straight ahead, made me wonder if he was following the words as I had been. I didn't know then, as I do now, that change can be worse than death for some to bear.

It was nearly dark when we got back, all of us chilled through. Bo had a fire in the study and when I carried a jug of hot water in for him to mix a toddy, I saw the Major had opened the Bible and was absorbed in its pages. I was to find him bent over it more and more as the winter wore on. It drove us all distracted, for it wasn't as if he turned to the comforting parts, though perhaps in some grim way he got a measure of relief from his delvings into the Old Testament. Even Henry Willis

was bothered by it and he was the least easily tried of men. It must have been along toward the end of February that Major Fortune took me into his confidence.

"Kate," he said one morning when I passed the study door, "if your mother can spare you for an hour or so I'd like you to do some copying for me. My fingers feel the cold and you ought to write a clear hand at your age."

He sat me down at his desk with a pen and the back half of a big leatherbound book, full of blank pages. "Bark Fortunate Star" was printed on the cover with the date 1853. I was struck by the name. It seemed a queer choice for him to have made out of all those log-books that had come back from the ship-yard.

"Yes," I thought to myself, as I dipped the pen and held it in readiness over the empty page, "I guess 'The Unfortunate Star' would be more like it nowadays. Well, it's gone for old wood by now and whoever the mate that kept this log was, he won't know the use it's being put to."

I waited, doubtful and curious for him to begin. It was then that I saw he had his Bible bristling with paper markers.

"I want you to head it 'Lines to Steer by in Time of Stress'" he told me at last. "Be careful you get the words exact, the Bible's not to be tampered with."

He began with verses that were already familiar to me:—

"They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters, these see the works of the Lord and his wonders in the deep."

There followed others, all of a sea-faring nature:—

"With the east wind thou breakest the ships of Tarshish. As we have heard so we have seen." And, "Thine heart shall fear and be enlarged, because the abundance of the sea shall be converted into thee,—Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as doves to their windows? Surely the isles shall wait for me and the ships of Tarshish,—and the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls."

Sometimes he skipped about and sometimes he went on steadily for whole pages. He read and I copied till my fingers ached.

He was all on the ships of Tarshish that day and the Cedars of Lebanon that went into their making. It seemed to me as if he saw them plain, being built and launched from his own ship-yard. I got to know them pretty well myself before the dinner bell called us from the study.

"What in creation is he up to?" Mother asked me later.

"I can't make it out yet," I told her, "but he's got something on his mind. I think he misses his own vessels so he has to read about those in the Old Testament."

"Well, it's past me," she sighed with her arms deep in soap suds, "If he wants comfort he'd better take to the Gospels."

"It isn't comfort, mother, it's shipping he's after," I insisted.

I knew I was right and each day's copying proved it. When it wasn't the ships of Tarshish, it might be the destruction of Tyre. I think the Prophet Ezekiel would have been pleased if he could have seen the Major's absorbed interest in his words and the way he sought out all he could find about winds and waves and seamanship.

"It's remarkable," he said once as we paused while I put in a new pen point, "to find it all here so exact and ship-shape. They knew their ropes then, same as now, better than many will in a few years from the look of things in these parts."

"They had the same sea and stars," I put in timidly, "and the same east wind to contend with."

"The same," he agreed with a grave nod, "and they came to the same sad pass after their times of prosperity. Are you ready to go on?"

After he had rolled out a sentence my pen would scratch in the stillness of Fortune's Folly. I can hear the very tones of his voice as I turn those pages I labored so over.

"These were thy merchants in blue clothes and broidered work, and in chests of rich apparel bound with cords and made of cedar. . . . The ships of Tarshish did sing of thee in thy market, and thou wast replenished and made glorious in the midst of thy seas."

I thought as I wrote on of those old sayings about Fortune ships, and how no port was too far for them to cast their shadows. I thought of the chests in The Folly attic that still held lengths of silk and embroidery and that gave out a sweet, sad scent when the covers were raised. I looked up and nodded to show that my pen had caught up with the words, and the Major read on:—

"The suburbs shall shake at the sound of thy pilots. And all that handle the oar, the mariners and all the pilots of the sea shall come down from their ships. They shall stand upon the land and shall cause their voice to be heard against thee, and shall cry bitterly."

His own voice took on a new depth of feeling as he neared the end of the long passage.

"And in their wailing they shall make up a lamentation for thee and lament over thee, saying:—What city is like Tyre, like the destroyed in the midst of the sea? When thy wares went forth out of the seas, thou filledst many people; thou didst enrich the kings of the earth with the multitude of thy riches and of thy merchandise. In the time when thou shalt be broken by the seas in the depths of the waters, thy merchandise and all thy company in the midst of thee shall fall."

My cheeks grew flushed as I wrote, for something of his own despair reached out to me. I remember that we both came to with a start when the clock struck twelve, calling us back to other doings than the destruction of Tyre.

CHAPTER XIX

WE WERE storm bound that year on my birthday. The roads were not passable for mud and the sea was wild on the ledges. It was my twenty-first birthday and mother mourned that she could only contrive a cake for the occasion. Jake apologised, too, when he got up the day after the gale because he came empty handed. But mother and I were hungry for news and he brought us plenty.

"Blodgett's giving up the store," he told us, "says he's too old to learn new tricks to please the rusticators. He's made Will Stanley a fair proposition to take it over."

"Is he going to, Jake?"

"He'd like nothing better if he can raise the cash. It isn't just buying Blodgett out, he'll need enough besides to stock up for next summer. It's cluttered up now with stuff nobody wants to buy."

"I expect Ruth wants him to," I put in.

"You're right she does. She driven Martha'n me most crazy all winter with her sighs and complaints. Will don't know how to handle her,—soon's he takes one step forward she hauls him back. We had an awful set-to over the whole business three days ago."

"And how'd you come out?" Mother asked.

"Well, it all comes on to me, same's I expected," Jake helped himself to another chunk of my birthday cake and continued. "If I put up half the money Will can manage the rest. They want to get married the end of next month so's he can take May and most of June to fix things nice for the summer trade. They think they can housekeep in those rooms over the store."

"Seems a good plan," mother agreed, "if you can help 'em out."

"That's just the point. It'll take every dollar I've got saved, and there won't be much return for two or three years maybe. There I'll be, tied up with no chance for my own plans."

I sat quiet listening. One side of me felt disappointed and a little envious of Ruth, who would have her home first, at our expense; the other felt a sort of relief that I need not face immediate change and uprooting. I had never been more pleased to see Jake than on that March afternoon, or more grateful for his hearty kiss and birthday wishes. Yet the old misgivings came over me again as I thought of being married to him and living off by ourselves on the old Noyes' place.

"Anyway I figure it comes to the same thing in the end," he was going on. "I've got to carry Martha and the house the next couple of years. If I help Will now he stands a fair chance of making a go of it, and then he'll help and I'll get back what I put in. If I don't do it those two are going off some place same's Hilda did."

"I guess you'll have to do it, Jake," mother advised. "You can't leave Martha in the lurch, and you and Kate are real young yet. What's a year or two more of waiting?"

"It's a lot to me," he sighed. "How 'bout you, Kate, you haven't had a word to say hardly?"

"I'll stand by whatever you decide," I told him. "It's your money. You worked hard enough for it."

"That's why I hate to see those two get the benefit of it. I'd counted on fixing over the Noyes' place next fall. Yes, I'd seen you'n me all married and settled there by another Christmas."

"Maybe you can sell off a slice of that land this summer to somebody."

"Maybe's an easy word to say, but I'll do my best. And another thing I forgot to tell you. Hilda's husband's lost his job in Portland. We just got word yesterday. She's expecting a baby, too, and Martha's all for taking 'em in again."

"Mercy," Mother exclaimed, "after the way Hilda turned up her nose at Little Prospect before!"

"Guess it'll look different to her now. Well, anyhow, Ed Phillips could help in the store. He's too slick for me, but customers like the talk he gives 'em. Hilda was good at the books, so we could kind of keep the business right in the family."

"Don't pay more'n you can to outsiders."

"And I've been thinking, too," he went on, growing more pleased with the enterprise as he talked, "it wouldn't be a bad idea for Will to put in a bakery counter for summer trade. Home-made stuff would sell good, I know that from what I see round back doors when I do my delivering. You could send down your things, Mis' Fernald, nobody round here can touch your pie crust or bread."

Mother laughed.

"Goodness," she said, "you certainly want to get us all worked into the business. I might try it if the family here at The Folly keeps as small as it is now. I hope all these irons you've got heating in different fires won't be too much for you to tackle."

Jake had grown cheerful again by the time he was ready to go.

"I'm real glad you took it this way," he said to me in the entry as he lit his lantern. "I hated to come and tell you about another long wait."

"Maybe we'll be glad in the end," I said, "but I do begrudge Ruth getting ahead of us."

"Me too, but it'll be something gained to have her out of the house. I mean to beat the devil at work this summer. You'll see."

By April we began to hear rumors of the lumber cutting project. After the freshets were past we saw the dreaded signs across the Creek. About fifty men set up camp near the tide-water. Their log shacks and canvas tents rose almost in a night. Like huge, poisonous toadstools they seemed to me as I watched from the upper windows. And there was an evil looking black engine that I knew would soon be put to the work of devouring

all the thick and vigorous green. My heart sank clear to my shoes at what I knew was ahead.

"I wonder what Old Lady Phibben and that crazy son of hers will do now the lumber camp's so near?" Mother remarked soon after the men appeared. "The old mill's right in the path of their cutting and any commotion's likely to set him off the handle."

"Oh, dear," I sighed, "seems as if they could leave a few trees near the water line."

"They won't," she prophesied, "you'll see. They always make a clean sweep of it, can't be bothered to pick and choose."

"You mean they'll take the little trees, too?"

"Certain they will. What they can't make use of for timber they'll let go for pulp. I've seen 'em at it inland, and when they go it's nothing but stumps for the season's work."

"Mother," I said, turning from the window that faced that way, "it seems as if I couldn't bear to see it with my own eyes, and hear the chopping all day long."

"Well, I don't know what you can do about it. If 'tisn't bearing one thing it's another, and you might's well learn it young."

"I wouldn't mind bearing trouble near so much."

"You'll get used to it after the first. Why, you won't hardly notice the chopping by fall."

"I'll never get used to it!" I told her with such vehemence she looked at me in alarm. "Not if they keep it up till Doomsday, I won't!"

The next thing we heard was that the old mill was to be cleared of its tenants. There had been complaints about crazy Tim the year before from summer people. So the selectmen were sending Tim away to the place in Rockland and his mother to another near Bangor. Jake couldn't understand why I took on so fiercely about the decision.

"They'd come on the town anyhow by another winter," he pointed out. "Nobody knows how they got through this last one."

"That's their business," I insisted hotly. "They're not asking for help and they never hurt anybody!"

"My Lord, Kate, don't work yourself up so over 'em! What are they to you?"

"They were good to me one time when we were little and lost and I got all stung with hornets. I won't ever forget it."

"You've got a lot of funny notions,—first it's trees, and then a pair of crazy loons, for the Old Lady's crazy, too, from all I hear."

"She's not. They've got no call to bundle her off that way!"

"Oh, can't you quit jawing, Kate? I didn't have a thing to do with it and all this rumpus won't keep 'em."

That night I lay awake a long time, thinking of my two visits to the ruined mill. I even got up from bed, lit a candle and rummaged through my writing case till I found the slip of paper with the fortune I had written down in Old Lady Phibben's own words. It was more than a year since I had given it a thought. It seemed more important now as I read it through with all that had happened between.

"Many a tree furnishes the handle of the axe that fells it," she had said. That made me shiver, thinking of the brown trunks across the inlet waiting for their end. And thinking of them put me in mind of the Major and his pride, which after all had brought about most of his troubles. Yes, I thought, pride is the axe that felled him, and he furnished it for himself. It was queer to think such things, and yet I had to read on to the part about love and me.

"She said I'd have plenty of love, though," I told myself under cover of the bedclothes again, "even if she couldn't be sure of the giving or taking. But she saw love running out between my fingers, she did say that." I pressed my hands together under the covers and was comforted. "Poor Old Lady Phibben," I thought as sleep overtook me.

Those lumber camp men were a rough lot. They may have seemed more so to us because most of them were French Canucks, who spoke with an accent we found it hard to under-

stand. Mother was in mortal dread they would prowl round The Folly and help themselves to chickens and fruit and whatever took their fancy. Once several of them did come, asking to buy milk in their broken English. But Frisky barked so furiously and mother was so emphatic in her refusal they never tried it again. We could hear their rude jeers and cat-calls in the evening from across the water, and sometimes they played accordions and mouth-organs and sang by their fires.

"They're a wild, roving lot and I don't trust one of 'em," mother would say when we heard them, "They'll be making up to some of the Little Prospect girls and leave trouble in their wake most likely."

I knew what she meant and I thought of Sadie Berry, though I had not had a chance to see her and the baby for months past. For myself I only minded the men's axes. The distant clamor beat all day long. No matter how I pounded or worked the churn or did other things to drown out the sound, it followed me wherever I went. Each morning I would try not to look at the waste that was being laid across the Creek, but always my despair drew me to the windows facing that way. Each day fresh gashes glared like open wounds; new swathes of bareness appeared in the long ranks of far-flung green. That steady ringing of steel on wood began to get into my blood and nerves. It beat through me like some relentless pulse that would drive me mad. I must keep on listening to those far blows and the dull thuds and rendings that followed, like the wash of a receding wave. I grew jumpy and worn till mother lost patience with me.

"If you carry on this way over trees," she said, "I don't know where you'll be when it comes to running a house and children. You've got to learn to put up with change."

"Not this kind, mother. It's a wicked shame to take them all."

"Well, other folks don't feel so. You'd better just turn your back on it same's I do."

But I couldn't do that and neither could the Major. He would scarcely leave the house, though the warm weather was beginning and the orchards were misty pink and white once more. He

kept every window he could shut tight and he stuck to his study which was farthest away from the sound of destruction. Although he never referred to the cutting, I would see him wince at some particularly loud crash, or at the snorts and chugging of the engine the men had begun to use for hauling. George went over sometimes to see how the work was going, and he reported that the squirrels and rabbits and birds were half beside themselves as more and more trees fell. Certainly our spruces had never been so alive with them. Even Frisky who had reached an age when she preferred sleep in a sunny spot to violent chasings of fur and feathers, roused herself against the new intruders.

I wrote sometimes to Nat and Rissa and in mid-July I had news of them. Rissa wrote, for Nat and Dick Halter were off on a walking trip in Switzerland while she stayed with some of her new friends at a place on the French coast.

"It is very different from the coast of Maine [she wrote], There are only a few trees and the beaches are sandy and all the fishing boats have reddish brown sails. But we eat lobsters and fish, just the same. I recognized a haddock yesterday, though it went by a different name. This house has a wonderful old garden with fruit trees trained to grow flat against the wall. George would be surprised if he could see them.

Nat is going to study in Germany next winter. He wants to hear opera in Berlin and Munich, and maybe we will go to Vienna in the Spring. Dick has an order to paint a portrait of an American lady, and he has sold another picture that was in a big exhibition. He is getting along better, though he still goes around looking just as shabby.

Henry Willis writes to me sometimes, but not father. I hope you are all well and I wonder if the Drakes have opened their place. Good bye from,

Clarissa Fortune."

Sundays were a relief to me that summer because there was no chopping across the water. We all went to church with the Major and afterwards mother and I had our weekly visit at the

Jordans. Hilda and Ed Phillips were back, and Ruth and Will Stanley always came over for mid-day dinner. The new store gave us plenty to talk about, and the men reported good business. Will said he could sell twice the home-made food mother and Cousin Martha could bake between them. He had schemes for a bakery wagon to deliver it by another summer, and only Jake's firm reminders of accounts to be settled and money put back into the business kept him down to earth at all.

"You've got to remember it's a short season," Jake would say when Will and Ed got over-expansive. "The store don't hardly pay for itself in winter and there's re-stocking ahead next Spring. Some folks get the notion all their eggs have got double yolks."

Ed Phillips, having had no money to put into the enterprise, was always the first to suggest new ventures. I had little patience with him, and his easy and over-bearing ways. He felt himself better than Jake, which always maddened me and sent me flying against anything he might propose. However I might disagree with Jake when we were alone, I always took his side when the lot of us were together. We came to count on one another's support at such times and it made a bond between us.

Now that Ruth and Hilda were both married ahead of me they gave themselves a good many airs. Hilda would snap out little barbed-wire retorts if I expressed an opinion, and Ruth, though less sharp-tongued than her sister, never forgot her own importance. They made it plain that they had achieved marriage, while I was still single and couldn't be expected to have much say. It rubbed me the wrong way to remember that I might have been the first of us to marry but for Jake's having to do for them. I often sputtered to him about it when we were together.

"It does rile me," I told him sometimes after some long argument, "the way they put on corn starch airs to us."

"Yes," he said, shaking the heavy lock of hair off his forehead as if he were a badgered colt, "I want to knock their two heads together when they get telling me how to run the store. And Ed Phillips,—he's the best hand I ever did see to spend

somebody else's money. I notice he don't put a dollar into the business. Will's all right and he knows how to suit the summer trade, but he's got no head for profits. He's slow, too."

"Yes, mother says he needs to eat a piece of mad dog." I laughed.

"I'd like to be the one to feed it to him! Remember how Sam used to say of some easy going fellow at the ship-yard, 'he might meet with a snail, but he'd never catch up to one.'"

I smiled to myself, remembering how many times mother and Cousin Martha had made the same remark about Jake. But he was slow in a different way. Will might let things slide, but Jake never did.

"You put me in mind of a crab sometimes," I used to tell him, "you'll hang on to anything you want like grim death."

"I've got to," he would say, pleased, rather than offended at my words, "Crab or no crab, I mean to get ahead and have things my own way. I give myself seven years more to do it in."

"You'll be thirty by then."

"Yes, and I mean to have my own business and house and ten thousand dollars cash in the bank."

I was startled by the definiteness of his plans and it wasn't till afterwards that it occurred to me he had not mentioned me in his list. I guessed that he took me for granted along with the house, and that hurt me a little. Yes, he was very sure of me, and we did need each other that year now we were each shouldering more responsibilities.

Mother was leaning harder on me than ever before, though she tried not to let me see she was worried by the affairs at The Folly. Annie Button was ailing all the time and mother had to help them with housework as well as buoy George up when he was down.

"If I had to worry over you, too, Kate, I don't know what I'd do," she often told me. "Not that I wouldn't be glad if you and Jake could get married soon, but long's you can't, I won't deny I take comfort in you."

Looking back on it now, I think it might have been better for

me if she had not had to lean quite so heavily on my youth. I gave of it freely enough, but it made me old ahead of my years. Something deep and fierce in me wanted youth, and yet I lived with age and suited my ways to it up there in Fortune's Folly. Say what you will, that can never be right or natural. The birds know it and push their fledglings out the nest. No young wings ever flew far or high that carried old ones on their backs. Not that I thought of it then, I was used to things as they were, and I comforted myself that before long Rissa and Nat might return and that Jake and I would begin our plans for a home. I lived from day to day, with vague hopes and the clamor of the lumber camp that I could never reconcile.

The Major still sent for me on certain mornings to continue the copying. By late August we had almost filled the log-book, though we were still far from the New Testament. In some strange way it had brought us together. I did not dread the hours I gave him in the study and sometimes I even spoke up with a question or comment of my own. He still hunted out the passages about the sea and all things pertaining to it, but sometimes he had me set down others that struck him. As I turn those pages now, I can hear how his voice shook over:—"And the rest of the trees of his forest shall be few, that a child may write them."

Even with the windows closed we could hear the distant chopping, and I had to look up when I had written it and meet his eyes. Neither of us said a word, but he must have guessed that I felt that verse was like a memorial to Fortune woods.

There were others that seemed to carry a direct meaning to the changes all about us and to his own family troubles. I knew his secret pain and it seemed to me that the cry of his own heart spoke out through the Prophet Jeremiah.

"Why have they provoked me to anger . . . with strange vanities? The harvest is past, the summer is ended and we are not saved. For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt . . . astonishment hath taken hold on me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?"

Yes, it was as if Jeremiah must have known all that the Major had on his mind. It is strange to remember it now and how the August sunshine fell across the worn palm-leaf pattern of the study carpet and on the dahlia tops that showed, russet and crimson and yellow, just above the level of the window sill. It was almost a year since Rissa and Nat had left. That must have been in his thoughts as well as mine though neither of us mentioned it to the other.

"Couldn't you find something more . . . more comforting, Major?" I plucked up courage to ask him.

He gave me one of his long looks from under those thick gray brows.

"It is comfort enough to me to know that I am not alone in my extremity," he explained gravely. "I suppose," he went on after a silence, "that you are too young yet to understand why I should crave the company of those who have known trouble, too."

"It would make me feel worse," I said, for he had unbent to me more than usual that morning. "I think I'd hunt for something to put the heart in me."

"Perhaps so, but we can never tell how things will take us when they come. Well," he smiled faintly, "if you think you can find any such passage you're welcome to."

He laid the open Bible beside me on the desk. I hadn't expected that and I was taken aback, not knowing what to look for or where to find help. The clock in the east parlor struck twelve and there came a far whistle across the Creek to call those other woodsmen to their dinner. In the sudden silence I began to search the pages before me. This time, I felt, I had been given another chance to speak out to the Major. Before I had had to be ruthless. Now I could afford to be kind and I wanted to be. It must have been some sort of providence, not just chance, which drew my eyes to that particular verse. The black letters seemed to spring up clear from the rest of the pages I turned.

"Here," I made to hand it back to him.

"No," he said, "you must read it to me this time."

As if I were someone else I heard myself reading out what I had found.

"And there is hope in thine end, saith the Lord, that thy children shall come again to their own border."

He gave no sign, but I thought his face had relaxed a little when I dared look into it again.

"Do you want me to write it with the rest?" I asked him.

He shook his head.

"No," he said, "you found it, so I must be the one to set it down." He reached for a pen and I rose to give him my place at the desk. "You can go back to your other work," he said without looking up, "I won't be needing you any more today."

When I had carried dinner in to the dining room, I stepped across the hall.

"Dinner's ready, Major," I said, without looking in the door. I was turning to go to Henry Willis' room when I risky's queer actions stopped me. She had followed at my heels and all at once she began to sniff and whine and look up into my face. Peering in past the curtains, I saw the Major still at his desk, but all slumped over to one side with his head on the open log-book.

"Major!" I cried, but he didn't seem to hear me.

I ran in and tried to rouse him. I could feel him breathing hard and his face was dull red under the grey, but he was a dead weight in my arms.

"Mother," I called from the hall, "Mother, come quick!"

"It's a stroke," she said the minute she saw him. "Ring the bell for Bo and George, we're going to need them."

They came on the run from the lower cornfield and between us we got him to the east parlor sofa. We did all we could till the doctor came, but he never came to enough to know any of us, not even Henry Willis who was alone with him in the early morning when he died.

Bo was like a frightened child. He went about the house, sobbing and hanging cloths over all the mirrors. He had some no-

tion that a dead person's spirit was around loose and could get caught in some spell that way. He stopped all the clocks, too, but I hid the key to the door of the French one where he couldn't find it. I knew the Major wouldn't have wanted that to stop after the years he'd wound it. So all the time he lay there, the little woodsmen went about their business the same as they always had; the same as they are doing now for me all these years afterward.

I couldn't help noticing that he had died facing Nat's piano, and even though he couldn't have seen it, I thought that must be a good sign. Later I went in to the study to make sure if he had copied that verse down. There it was at the head of a new page, in his own hand, firm to the last letter. He must have toppled over as he reached to lay down the pen, for it lay in a blot of ink nearby.

Little Prospect had not had such an important funeral since the second Nathaniel Fortune died. The church could hardly hold all who came to pay their last respects. They came by boat and carriage and train and all the summer people remarked on the number. Reverend Chase preached a regular sermon about him. He compared him to the keeper of a great lighthouse which the Fortune family had raised on the coast for generations. He was very eloquent about it and he prayed that there might be others of his name to keep that light from going out in years to come. Everyone knew he meant Nat and Rissa. But somehow not that or all the solemn verses he read could make me feel as I did when I remembered that morning in his study. It seemed as if I must have known in some way I couldn't explain, that it would be his last. And I couldn't help thinking, as I sat there in the Fortune pew, how strangely things worked out sometimes. For who could have guessed that I, the square-rigged child who had feared and hated him for nearly a dozen years, should be the one to have fetched him a crumb of comfort before he died?

CHAPTER XX

THERE was a lot of talk and wondering about Major Fortune's will, for everyone knew how Nat and Rissa had offended him. With his pride it would have been like him to cut the pair off altogether, but on the other hand, who else had any right to The Folly? The guesses were answered a few days after the funeral when Henry Willis had a lawyer over to go through the papers. They were busy in the study all the morning, and the Major's sister, Mrs. Marlin, who had stayed on to find out where she stood in the matter of legacies, would have liked to be there too. She had been more fault finding and trying than on her other visits, calling for impossible dishes and hot water at all hours; complaining of the covers and wall papers and all but saying that mother and I had picked her dead brother's pockets and given no service to speak of in return. Henry Willis had never got along with her, and though he remained polite enough, he kept her out of the Major's affairs. Her look of outrage when he called for us all, Bo and Mother and me and George and Annie, to come into the study after dinner was something to remember.

"Well, I must say as his only sister I expected some special consideration," I heard her remark to the lawyer as we all filed in and she took her place in the most comfortable chair.

It was a recent will. He had made it only that spring and he began by denouncing young Nat and cutting him off with only the customary dollar. To Rissa, he was less harsh. The Folly and its remaining acres, some fifty or so, were to be hers, though Henry Willis was to remain there and see to its management during his lifetime. Also she was not free to sell it until she had

reached the age of thirty five. Such income as remained after his estate was settled should go for taxes and upkeep. It was hard for me to follow all the legal phrases but that was what it amounted to.

Certain investments he turned over to his sister, but I wasn't much interested in that part. Towards the end of the reading, however, we understood why we had been summoned, for the Major had not forgotten past services. To George and Annie Button he left the house they had lived in and four acres of land, along with five hundred dollars. To mother there was three hundred and to Bo two hundred and his place at The Folly as long as he lived. And then I heard my name being read off.

"To Kate Fernald, of said domicile," I remember the exact words they surprised me so, "in consideration of her loyal service to me and mine, the sum of one hundred dollars and any article of furnishing which she may desire to remove at the time of her marriage or departure from said premises."

"Well, I must say he done handsomely by us," mother began before we were fairly in the kitchen again. "I wasn't surprised his remembering George and Annie, for he'd always promised they should have the farmhouse when he went. But I never expected a cent and you could have knocked me over with a feather when he remembered you like that."

"It must have been on account of that copying. He never noticed me much before Nat and Rissa went."

"Rissa'll be wild when she hears how fast he's got her tied to The Folly."

"Yes," I agreed, "she'd sell it quick enough if it was so she could. But maybe she'll come back and get fond of it again after it's hers and she can run it her own way."

"Or if she marries, same's she'd ought to instead of chasing round the globe at Nat's heels. Oh, I guess the Major knew what he was up to when he made that will. There's the hall bell and that woman's hand is on it, I can tell way off here. Pray heaven she takes herself back to Philadelphia soon."

She left next day and we were thankful to help George stow

her things in the dog-cart. We had another long talk with Henry Willis and he told us it would be some months before things were settled enough for the money to be paid over.

"You'll get it as soon as I can straighten out his affairs, but Mrs. Marlin is pressing me to sell out those investments and I can't do much till I hear from Rissa. I'm urging her to come back, but I think it hardly likely she will before another spring. I shall stay on here and you're welcome to, only, of course, I don't know yet how much I'll be able to pay out in wages."

"Never mind that now," mother assured him. "I was fearful we might be left high and dry at the tail-end of summer. There won't be much work with just you to look after. Kate and I'll stay on for just our keep till things are so she can marry."

"Well," he seemed relieved at the arrangement, "if you're satisfied, I'm more than thankful. I shouldn't know how to go on without you here."

"I guess he's found things in a worse snarl'n he thought," mother said after he went out. "Well, I'm too old to change my ways, specially on the edge of cold weather."

"I suppose I could go and work in the store, mother."

"It's slack time now," she reminded me, "and if they did take you on another summer there'd be the trouble of getting you back and forth or boarding you down there. No, we'd better stick by The Folly, for another year anyhow."

There were cables from Rissa, but it took a month for Henry Willis' letter to reach her and the answer to arrive. He did not share the letter with me when it came, but he told me something of its contents.

"I have heard from Rissa and from Nat," he said the night it came as if I had not noticed the envelope in the mailbag. "They were properly shocked, and I am glad to say both expressed regret that they were so far away at such a time." He paused and screwed his forehead into the puzzled frown that was so often there in those days, "Nat seemed the more concerned. I must say I was surprised. I had expected Rissa to be

upset, she being the Major's favorite and the property coming to her."

He had never mentioned the relationship to me before, not in so many words.

"Nat's got a very warm heart," I pointed out, "and he never lays up grudges."

"He could have made trouble if he'd wanted to and even tried to break the will."

"Oh, he'd never do that," I jumped to Nat's rescue as I always did from force of habit.

"Well, he has certainly taken it in very good part. I can't help wishing his father might have got over some of his prejudices and come to feel differently towards the boy. But that's neither here nor there. Rissa seems to need more money and I suppose I must get it for her somehow. Nat, she writes, has had another of those old attacks."

"Not—the way he was after that voyage?"

"Not so serious I think, but he wasn't up to that walking trip he and young Halter took. It seems that started his heart trouble again and the doctors advise a milder climate for the winter. Rissa wants to go to the south of France and not come back here till summer."

"Can you get them the money?"

"I shall do my best, though things are pretty tied up as you know."

"If it's any help to let my hundred dollars wait," I told him, "you can. I don't need it yet awhile."

He gave me a preoccupied smile.

"You're very generous, Kate," he said, "but I guess I can manage without that."

It wasn't till a good many years later that I found out he had sent Rissa enough to carry them through the winter out of his own pocket.

The letter I had from her in a few weeks said little beyond a few lines of formal regret over her father's death. But she did give me what I most craved to hear, news of Nat's health.

"He must have overworked last winter [she wrote], though he was so busy and happy with his composing we never noticed at the time. Dick shouldn't have taken him on that walking trip and I saw the harm was done when they got back. He's been in and out of bed ever since. But the doctors here think rest and going south till Spring will fix him up again and I have written Henry Willis to get us the money to go. I wish father hadn't tied up everything so tight, but I suppose it was his way of paying me back.

Nat works when he can every day. He is doing a symphony and we have great hopes for it. All the musical people here think he will be famous if he can get it played. Will Drake writes they are all coming over to Europe this winter, so we shall probably see them. Dick is well and wants to be remembered.

Clarissa Fortune."

I could tell from the few pencilled lines Nat had enclosed that he must have written on his knees in bed.

"Dear Kate,

You were good to write us about father and you told us more than Henry Willis or Aunt Esther. I'm glad you were the last one with him. I wish things had been different all along and especially at the end. If he had only lived I think I could have proved to him that I am not a failure the way he always thought. I wanted to have him hear my symphony because it is going to be about ships and the sea and the launching of the old 'Rainbow'. Do you remember those hammers on the blocks? I can't get them out of my mind. Tell Frisky I miss her on the foot of my bed when I am laid up with one of these spells. Love from

Nat."

When I had finished reading it over I reached down and petted the wagging brown shape at my feet. She was getting to be an old small dog nearly twelve. I noticed with a pang the white around her muzzle and the stiffness of her legs. She blinked at my sudden affection and turned over to take another nap.

So we settled ourselves for the winter into the old ways. I was lonely there at The Folly, but that was better than if we had had

to go and live with Cousin Martha. Besides Hilda's baby had come, and it was a pindling one that needed constant care.

"It would drive you crazy to be in that house," Jake told mother and me. "When 'tisn't him hollering, it's Ed and Hilda in a squabble. You were sensible to stay here till our time comes."

He had sold off one piece of the Noyes' property to pay off what he still owed. I hoped there had been a few hundred left over to lay out in repairs, but when I asked him about this he looked so sheepish that I guessed he had other plans.

"I've just about made up my mind to buy Little Heron Island," he confessed when I pinned him down. "I can get it real cheap now and someone else will snap it up if I don't."

"But you won't have anything left for our house, Jake."

"Little Heron's too good a buy to lose," he insisted. "I stand to make a couple or three thousand if I can hold it awhile."

"And if we put our wedding off," I reminded him.

"Well," I could see by the set of his jaw and shoulders that his mind was made up, "I figure a few thousand dollars will be more to us in the end. I wouldn't have taken a chance on one of the farther islands, but Little Heron's so near the harbor some rich summer family's sure to want it and I can make a big turnover."

"Jake," I said, "seems to me you're getting more land-crazy every year. I don't mean to take on, or question what you do, only—" I broke off not liking to bring up our marriage plans again. It was one of those days when I was feeling lonely and troubled. I had been so pleased to see him turning in at the drive a few minutes before, and now it was just more talk of real estate and delay. "I could put that money the Major left me into the house as soon as I get it."

"Better say *when* you get it," he laughed. "No, you keep that for your own things. See here, Kate," he softened a little seeing my disappointment, "you don't s'pose I like to keep putting it off, do you?"

"But you always put the profits ahead of us."

"Oh, you're like all the rest of the women,—can't any of you see beyond your own noses? I want to get out from under Martha's roof a good sight more'n you think, but I want a good bank account, too. I'm certain to get an offer for Little Heron by next summer. You'll see."

So we were back where we had started from, as I had known from the first we should be.

By early winter the lumber camp was abandoned. All the trees were down as far I could see on that side of the Creek, with only a sparse fringe of green left on the shore lots. It seemed as if there were miles of piled brown logs waiting to be taken away in the spring, and more would be floated from farther up the inlet when the ice broke. Anything was easier to bear than the noise of the axes, even the acres of fresh stumps I must see whenever I looked in that direction. No more birches to put on October gold; no more maples to flame there, no more needled green of spruce and fir and pine,—there was only the memory of them like a pain at my heart. I longed for a white winter to cover the desolation and I had my wish.

It was the year of the big March blow that turned into a blizzard. They talk about it yet, though only a few of us actually remember it. I had good reason to. For days everything had been ice-coated and the Narrows frozen so that the packet could not break through for three of her weekly trips. People from the nearer islands could walk or drive across to the Harbor. It only happened once in every twenty years or so, for a twelve foot tide is hard to freeze over. It was too cold for birds and rabbits and foxes to be about. Only the gulls went foraging for food and they had hard work to keep alive. Many froze or starved and they grew so tame from hunger that they would eat the cleanings of fish from men's hands before they had time to toss these out. I had little to spare them, for we needed every scrap for George's pig and the hens. It was too bitter and frozen for fresh fish most of the time and we lived on what was salted and smoked.

"Lucky we let most of the livestock go," George told mother

and me, "there's a shortage of hay and feed everywhere. Lots won't be able to last through till spring."

Fancy and Folly were too old to be much good getting through the drifts. Often George or Bo and I would take the big bob-sled and get through to the village for mail and supplies. The road by the water kept pretty clear, but in the wooded spots it was deep and crusted over. We slid where we could and pulled together on the up-grades. I enjoyed those breaks from the monotony of the house and sometimes I stayed for a meal at the Jordans and had a chance to see Jake and bring news of Little Prospect doings to mother. I saw Sadie Berry now and again. She was happy and full of plans for she had taken up with one of the men from the lumber camp. He was gone for the winter, but she confided to me that he would be back and that they meant to be married when he could settle down in the neighborhood.

"Louis isn't much to look at," she confessed, "but he's pleasant and he likes the baby. He's part French and comes from up Montreal way. He wants to get a boat and work here for some summer family."

She had turned out to be very handy with the baby, who was a queer, smart little fellow, as different from Sadie as could be, with his dark eyes and solemn small face. He was the first young one I ever got to know well, and we took to each other.

"You'd be good with one of your own, Kate," Sadie told me.

"That doesn't mean I'll have any," I answered her back, but I didn't tell her I hoped she was right.

Hilda and Ed's baby was peevish and trying. Jake and I were agreed about not having a good word to say for him.

"He'd drive me to drown myself some days if the Harbor wasn't frozen solid," he used to tell me. "If he was mine I'd learn him a few plain truths."

"I guess you'd be pretty foolish about any young one that was yours," I reminded him. "Jake, what about the old Noyes' place? Have you been by to see how it looks in winter?"

"Yes, it's kind of bleak," he admitted. "I walked along that

way on the ice last week. But it's standing up good against so much snow."

I sighed and gathered up my things to go. It had stopped snowing when Bo and I had come down with the sled, but now the flakes were beginning again and the afternoon was darkening fast.

"I wish the two of us was over there in it now, snow or no snow," he said, "Well, I'll walk a ways back with you."

If he had taken me in his arms and asked me to marry him then and there and go over to the windy old shell in mid-winter, I would have jumped at the chance. The long months of cold had worn me down more than I guessed. It came over me that bitter afternoon how much I was missing up there in The Folly, and how much I wanted love and things of my own. I felt I shouldn't mind cold and hard work or anything, and it was on my tongue to plead with him not to make me go on waiting any longer. But I had my pride, and I knew it was his place to be urgent.

I often think now how different things might have turned out if Jake had gone partway back as he planned to. But Hilda heard us at the door and called down that they were all out of some supply or other Jake had promised to get before dark.

"I'll have to go and fetch it if I want any peace tonight," he said after he had banged the door behind us. "She could just as well have asked Ed when he went to the store, and now it's too late."

"You'd better go," I told him, "It's snowing harder now. There's Bo waiting for me by the post office. We haven't any time to waste."

"I don't know but you'd ought to stay with us tonight," Jake said as we parted.

"I can't, Jake, it takes two of us to pull the sled, and you haven't any place for him."

Almost before Bo and I had gone a mile I began to wish that George had come instead. Bo was getting shaky and felt the cold more than the rest of us. We had an extra heavy load of

supplies lashed on the sled, for there was flour to replenish and a bag of oats for George. We had to take turns pushing from behind on the up-grades, and steadyng the runners on the down slopes. The road was mostly sharp rises and pitches, so there were only short spells where we could both pull together at the ropes. That kept us back, and though the snow which fell near the sea was never very deep, it had drifted into uneven piles over the ruts and hollows. On the long stretch above The Narrows the wind seemed to have gathered more chill from blowing across that icy space. It drove a fierce, slanting wall of white against us, and though the flakes were fine they cut like icicles. I took the sea-side, keeping myself between Bo and the teeth of the storm, but even so he lagged behind, and sometimes it seemed to me that I was carrying his weight as well as the sled's. We had a lantern under the tarpaulin cover, but we couldn't have got it lit in that wind and its light wouldn't have reached far in that snowy whirl. Neither of us wasted breath on words and Bo was only a dim black shape beside me.

"We must be about by the schoolhouse," I thought, "we're on another rise and that's the cross-roads' sign over there."

I could just make it out in the blowing dimness and I knew we must have got halfway back. The Sprague farm was a good mile ahead and if we once made that we could stop and rest and warm ourselves and maybe one of the men would see us the rest of the way. Thinking of that I braced myself harder against the wind and shook the wet hair out of my eyes. I felt the way a young horse must, harnessed with an older mate. As we started down the other side of the ridge the runners began to take it too fast and press down upon us. I went behind to hold back the weight, leaving Bo to keep the sled in the wheel ruts we could feel under our feet. Maybe I was to blame for what happened, for my hands had grown numb; maybe Bo stumbled first and dragged it after him. The next thing I knew it was jerked from my hold and Bo went down with a smothered cry.

When I got to them, Bo and the sled were in a heap in a hol-

low by the roadside. Snow had drifted there and I went in above my knees.

"Bo," I cried, "are you all right?"

But there was no answer in all that wind and hissing whiteness. The sled was on top of him and I thought I should never budge it. But I pulled and strained till I got it clear of him. He lay face down in the snow and I had to dig him out with my bare hands, feeling, rather than seeing what I did.

"Bo," I cried again, "are you hurt?"

"I'm 'fraid so, Missy," he managed to gasp, "those runners went through my chest, seems like."

Somewhere I read once that the mind can think on clearly and work out problems, while the body is strained to the breaking point, past all sense of thought. I have always believed it after that night. I did not know I thought, but I must have been turning over all possible schemes as I struggled to get him out of that ditch. I never bothered to tell myself that our only chance of shelter was the schoolhouse on the ledge above the road, I only knew I must get him there. He tried to rise but he groaned so I knew there was no chance of that. Somehow or other I undid the ropes and dumped everything off the sled. I had to drag him to it and tie him on as if he were the sack of flour that had been there. Bo was little and old and frail. It didn't seem possible he could be this leaden weight I was straining over. When I tried to pull the sled with the load of his body, I thought I should never start it. Sweat ran down my face even in that bitter cold. But I bent my whole strength to it and somehow got it to the road. Then I felt my way, foot by foot, back to a fence post that marked the steep path we had always used to reach the door. It was only a couple of hundred yards from the road to the schoolhouse, but I marvel now that I ever made it and I have no notion how long it took me. I crawled like an inch worm, bent nearly double, with the sled ropes wrapped under my arm pits. Those ropes and my own breath cut into my chest till it seemed I must break with the pain. I slipped and caught at scrubby bits of half-buried spruce to keep

my footing. Under the snow drifts the ice was glaring, polished from the children's slides. Twice I went down, but saved myself by clinging to rocks and juniper. Bo called out something to me and I gave no heed. I had not even breath enough for a word.

That dark, square shape of the schoolhouse looked like heaven to me when I got to it, and I remembered that the key always used to be kept in a knot-hole behind the second shutter. The door and windows faced south, away from the sea, and that helped. My strength was about gone then. I leaned against the door and panted, with Bo in a heap at my feet. I knew my way about in there even in the dark. Every inch of it was familiar,—the little entry with its coat pegs and water pail and pile of chopped wood, and beyond the desk filled schoolroom. School had been over since three o'clock, but it had kept warm inside and a remnant of wood still smouldered in the iron stove.

I got Bo inside and fetched more kindling and sticks, and presently the fire was going again. After I began to breathe more easily I made myself go out and rub snow on my frost-bitten hands. Then I made the door fast and went back to Bo and the fire. He groaned and muttered as I tried to get off his snow soaked coat.

"We're out of the storm anyhow," I told him, "I guess we couldn't have made The Folly even if you hadn't gone down. Where does it hurt you the most?"

He told me once more how he had fallen with the sled on top of him. He was sure it had stove his chest in. I could tell from feeling that it wasn't that bad, but I guessed that he had a broken rib and one of his legs was bruised and swelling. I found an old cape in the entry and wrapped him in that while I spread his wet clothes to dry on the nearest seats. The teacher always kept matches and a candle in one of the desk drawers and I found them and made us a light. I brought the dipper full of water and set it on the stove top to heat. I remembered that I had bought a little packet of tea for mother and that I had put it in my pocket. I fished it out, thankful that the tin-foil wrap-

pings had kept it dry. The candle was hardly more than a stump, so I put it out and opened the stove door to give us light.

Up to then it had seemed good fortune enough to be out of the storm in any shelter, but suddenly I felt weary beyond belief. I couldn't keep my eyes open, though I struggled to. I have no notion how long I slept there with my head against a wooden bench and my feet stretched out to the warmth. I woke, stiff and shivering, to find the fire down to a few glowing shreds and the dipper rocking with steam. I stuffed in more wood and brewed us a dipper full of strong tea. We drank it turn about, grateful for the bitter warmth it brought us.

"Must be most mornin', Missy Kate?" Bo said as I raised him to drink it.

"No, Bo, not yet. I guess mother and Henry Willis are wondering why we don't come back, only they probably think we stayed in the village."

"'Fore God, I wish we had," he sighed. "What kin' of a place is this here?"

His eyes rolled in the dimness.

"It's the schoolhouse, Bo. There wasn't a chance we could make the Sprague's place. There's plenty of wood to burn here anyhow. I guess we can manage till they come for us."

But I wasn't as sure of that as I made out to him. Now that I had time to think again I began to be thoroughly frightened. Bo might be hurt worse than I knew. He was an old man, just how old none of us knew, not even the Major who had said his age was as much of a mystery as the lost tribes of Israel. I knew that if the storm kept up no one would think of opening school next day. I wasn't one to be skittish of wind and darkness and being alone, still, I couldn't seem to crowd back my fears. The wind tore at the north and easterly sides of the little frame building and the storm hissed and spit as I had never heard it in any before. The strong tea, which I was not used to drinking often, ran through my veins till every nerve in my body was tight as a tuned fiddle string. One of the window shutters with a broken catch swung and creaked and banged in the gusts. The

big map on the windowless north wall flapped like a live thing, and something I couldn't make out kept up a steady tapping outside. I dared not open the door to see. I felt I could never endure hours and hours of that incessant beat.

Bo dozed off a good deal, though he woke and groaned and begged for water. I tried to shift him to ease his pain and covered him with his clothes as they dried. His skin felt feverish to my touch and that made me anxious. I couldn't help thinking he might die there and I should feel him turn cold and stiff beside me. And then I thought that perhaps the chimney wouldn't be able to stand up against such a gale. I pictured everything possible that could happen to us till I was almost ready to run screaming out into the storm again to escape my own thoughts. I knew fear that night as I never have before or since.

I must have dozed at last, for I dreamed of the long ago launching of the "Rainbow" and the beat of those hammers on wooden blocks. There was a great press of people, but Nat was beside me.

"The hammers, Kate, listen," he was saying. He was beating time to them again on my knee.

"Oh, Nat," I cried out, "Oh, Nat, you're here and everything's all right!"

I must have waked myself, crying out his name, and there was Bo, with his groping old fingers clutching my knee.

"You talkin' to Master Nat in yo' sleep," he said. "I hear yo' call on him."

"I'd better have called on George or Jake Bullard," I sighed.

"Folks calls in dreams fo' the ones they loves best," he muttered, "Yo' cain't fool dreams,—I knows."

His wavering, foolish words went through me like a bolt. My heart began to knock and my cheeks to burn in the darkness. Bo might be old and half-foolish, but I knew he had spoken the truth. I ought to have called for Jake in my time of need, and I hadn't given him a thought. Bo was quiet again. He slept, but his words throbbed in my head to the sound of windy tappings.

I couldn't stand it after awhile, so I went to the teacher's desk and lit the candle-end and found the Bible that was always kept there for morning exercises. It was a long time since I had read "The Song of Solomon". There it was before me on the candle-lit page, all the phrases that had been vague and disturbing, bright with new meaning.

*"I sleep but my heart waketh.
It is the voice of my Beloved that knocketh."*

I read as long as the candle lasted. My hands and feet felt numb, but those fragments of ancient passion were an inner fire to me.

*"Set me as a seal upon thine heart. As a seal upon thine arm.
For love is strong as death; jealousy as cruel as the grave.
The coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement
flame.
Many waters cannot quench love; neither can the floods drown
it."*

I read that over and over till those words were mine as truly as King Solomon's.

The candle failed and went out, but I had no more need of it. My eyes were opened that had been closed like the blind gentians we children used to find and pity for their being shut fast from sun and air.

It was noon of the next day before they came to dig us out. Time had stopped for me long before then. I only remember feeding the fire stick by stick and doing for Bo, and a sort of wonder when the wind died down and morning came in meagre gray through the shutters, and the first far ringing of sleigh bells when the men came to break the drifts. I couldn't have got the door open to hail them, but they said afterward they saw smoke at the chimney and knew someone was there. Jake was with them. He was on his way to The Folly to find out if I had

reached it safely. He looked more frightened when he saw me there than I ever supposed he could be.

"Lord, Kate," he said, stepping over poor Bo without so much as a look, "What's happened? Are you all right?"

"Yes, Jake, yes," I managed to tell him, before I began to shake and cry for relief at knowing I could go home.

His arms felt good to me and it was sweet to hear his anxious questions and reproachings of himself. I felt guilty thinking who had been foremost in my thoughts all those hours. But I was too spent to do anything but let him wrap me in my coat and take me out to the sleigh. The other men carried Bo out and covered him with the buffalo robes. The sun glittered on all that snow till I was dazzled. It seemed we were flying through the bright, cold air, though Jake fumed because the horses made such slow progress following after the snow-plow. Yes, I remember the tune of the sleigh bells and the squeak of the runners better than I do what he and the other men said, though they gave me great praise.

Bo had two crushed ribs and a broken ankle to show for that storm and our night in the schoolhouse. I know now that it marked me, too, in a different way.

CHAPTER XXI

IT WAS the summer of 1890 and Jake and I still having to put off our marriage plans. There had been first one thing and then another to delay us. An accident to Jake's boat took all his savings one summer. His whole season's profits would have been lost without a boat and as he pointed out to comfort me, we could never live way over on Noyes' point without a good one. I would have been willing to row in the old dory, but he wouldn't hear of it. Then the spring after, Cousin Martha took sick and had to be sent to Portland for months of doctoring. That ate into the store profits so fast that Jake could hardly bear to go over the accounts. Even when she returned she had to take things easy which meant extra help in the business now that Ruth and Hilda had husbands and babies of their own. Though Jake had urged my working in the store, I couldn't bring myself to, partly because I never got along well with Ed Phillips and partly because I was shy of strangers; not quick in the easy give and take with store customers.

"You just give 'em back their own sass," Jake told me when we discussed it. "When I hear 'em laughing behind my back or calling us 'natives', I just keep my mouth shut and tack an extra price on whatever they want to buy. I know how to deal with the whole lot of 'em."

I knew I could never do that. They made me feel stiff and awkward sometimes, yet I never resented them as he did. I suppose being raised with Rissa and Nat made the difference. I was more used to their ways and more like them in my own speech. Sometimes when summer visitors stopped me on the road to ask directions and I answered them, I would see a puz-

zled look on their faces, as if they couldn't quite place me. Once I heard two women mention it after I had walked on.

"I can't make that one out, can you?" One said to the other. "She looks like a native, but she doesn't speak like one."

That would have made Jake furious, but I had to admit that I wasn't like Little Prospect girls. I was like a wild plant that chance has set into an ordered garden. My roots had taken hold of the different soil. I had thriven and grown according to the more formal ways, but the seed I sprang from was wild seed. The pattern of root and leaf and flower could not change its shape. So it is with me to this day, though I can set down my thoughts in the manner of speech I learned from the Major and his children.

Little Prospect had its great boom in those years and changed more than in the last fifty they said. Trundy's Tavern put out a new sign and added two sprawling wings to its older brick. It was "The Prospect House" from then on, and people said it would rival the big "Skipper's Inn" on the site of Fortune ship-yard. Summer cottages were going up in every direction, low shingle ones that straddled the rocks, with porches like wooden birdcages. No one bothered to call their owners "rusticators" any more. They were accepted, along with the trade they brought. Little Prospect might laugh at their notions and grumble at some of their demands, but I don't know how it would have fared without them. They even revived a little of the interest in shipping, though this was only for summer craft such as knockabouts and sloops and skiffs. Major Fortune would never have come down to building that sort of rig, but there was money in it for those who could meet the demand.

Will Stanley knew how to please them, for he had pleasant ways, but it took Jake to get the bills paid. Will owned that and so it was beginning to be a profitable partnership. Jake carried on his fish route, too, with a couple of the younger boys to help him, and mother had more orders for her bread and pies than she could possibly fill. Ed Phillips brought her up supplies every day and carried down what she had baked in the de-

livery wagon he had finally persuaded Jake to buy. That was about the only ready money mother and I had, for the Major's affairs were still far from being settled. To this day I am hazy as to why, with everyone else in the neighborhood beginning to prosper, the Fortune estate should have dwindled so steadily.

For myself, I had my heights and my hollows: my times of despairing and my moments of unexplainable delight. I was hopeful and healthy and in my twenties. Ever since that night in the schoolhouse when Bo's feverish words had made me know my own heart, I had been troubled with spells of doubt. But as long as Nat stayed away I thought I could deal with them. I would almost get him out of my mind, and then something would come to remind me,—the piano when I dusted it; the stone Buddha we uncovered for the summer; the first chorus of crickets in September and a hundred other sights and sounds we had shared. I would be happy and restless for days if a letter came saying that he was better and having praise for the music he was writing, or if he sent me a note along with Rissa's or a bit of fern or pressed flower in the envelope. But I never confused what I felt with what had been settled for me long ago. I had no doubts that Jake and I could be happy together once we set up in the old Noyes' place. He had his faults and I had mine and we were used to them by that time. It never occurred to me that there was any other way for us, but I hoped that we would be married before those two came back to The Folly.

Love, I know now, is like that "vehement flame" in Solomon's Song which I dared not trust myself to read again. Hidden deep or covered with ashes for safety, it must somehow burn on and make its presence known to others. The heat of it steals through the very pores of the body; and is made manifest in secret ways.

"You've got better looking lately, Kate," mother remarked often. "You're all brightened up. Martha said so last week and Annie mentioned it the one before. Maybe you're the kind that

don't commence to bloom till well along in your twenties, like that late variety of rose George put out from cuttings."

That was the summer I was twenty four, just when we got the news that Rissa and Nat had landed and would soon be heading northeast. It was well for me that the week before their return was crowded with preparations. I needed hard work and I drove myself to it from morning to night. But there were two who would not be there to welcome them. Frisky and Bo had not lived through the winter before. They were both buried behind the orchard in a plot where some of the earlier Fortunes lay. Henry Willis had had a marble slab set up and the inscription had been lettered by the stone-cutter in Little Prospect at his direction:—

"This stone marks the last resting place of Sambo, who faithfully served the Fortune family for twenty five years. He was born in slavery; he served in war and in peace, and died in honorable regard."

"And the servant is free from his master."

He had searched the Bible for an appropriate verse and that one from the Book of Job seemed fitting.

There was a little marble foot-stone and I mourned so when poor Frisky went that he let it be inscribed:—"Here lies Frisky, a fox-terrier."

"That's stretching a point," mother remarked, "still, she'd better have the benefit of the doubt, poor thing!"

Jake had been all for bringing me another puppy from the village. He meant it kindly enough, but I said no. I couldn't bear to give myself to another pet for awhile. Frisky had been more than a dog to me. She was a link with Nat and the old days, and much of them had gone with her going.

Rissa and Nat were due by a late train and would take a buckboard over from Rockland, there being no horses at The Folly fit for driving. It was a fair day, right from the start. I

saw the sun rise over the eastern islands and the window curtains blew in from southwest which was a good sign. I worked in the garden all that morning for George had little time for tending the flower borders. So I managed to weed and water in odd moments and the perennials rewarded me. The larkspur was spiked and burning blue on either side of the front door; monks' hood rose darkly purple, and there were hollyhocks and masses of white and cherry and calico-pink phlox besides, with lemon lilies, thick round the stone Buddha. I had filled the Chinese jars and every vase and bowl I could lay hands on, and still the borders looked as if I had not touched a stalk. I couldn't but think it was like that with me, too. No matter how much of my love I spent, there was always more in me than could possibly be put to use.

We had got Blind Jim Hooper over to tune the piano. It stood open once more after the years of silence. The covers were off the harp, too, and a few strings were still left to shine in the cool, half-light of the east parlor. Everything, it seemed to me, wore a different look, as if even the furniture were aware of that return.

I kept watch on the window seat for the first sign of the carriage. Yes, I thought, there was I and there was the wooden bridge and the French enamel clock, all three of us in our places. But when I sighted it at last, I turned shy and waited behind a pillar.

"Kate, Kate Fernald, where are you?" I knew it for Nat's deep voice and my knees shook under my cambric skirts as I went to answer his call. I saw their figures through a blur, and when that cleared he was holding my two hands, swinging them as he used to when we were little. My eyes were almost on a level with his, though he seemed inches taller by reason of his slightness. His hat was off and his hair roughened on his forehead. He was exactly the same, in spite of a small dark moustache, and his left eyebrow was cocked at me in the old, questioning way.

"Why, Kate," he was saying, "I'd forgotten you were so

pretty!" Before I could answer he laughed and dropped my hands. "Here's Rissa."

She leaned out to give me a quick kiss, cool and blue and slim among all their bags and trunks. The drooping gray feather of her hat brushed my cheek, and a faint, sweet smell that I couldn't name, came with her light touch. It put me in mind of the fragrance we used to stir up in the attic when some old chest from far parts was opened,—a strange, sad smell. Somehow, for all her lovely youth and grace, she seemed already laid away in wrappings, like the carved ivory fan or her grandmother's pearl ear-rings, or the wax lady-doll that we used to admire and keep away from the sun.

Her face had a finer chiseling, as if she had whetted it in secret. The Major showed in her now, more than ever, though so delicately renewed. Yes, I saw that her chin was sharper, her cheeks less softly curved and though her hair was the same fine mist about her face there was less gold in its brown when she stepped out of the sunlight.

"We thought you'd be married with a husband and a house and a baby of your own by the time we got back!" She spoke lightly as I stooped to gather up some of their bags. We were not so given to mentioning babies ahead of weddings, and I flushed.

"Well, I'm glad you're not." Nat put in. "It wouldn't have seemed right without Kate here at The Folly."

Then he was hurrying over to greet mother.

"If you're not the same old piece of baggage, Nat Fortune," I heard her exclaim. "My, but you're tall and seedy as a milkweed stalk in November!"

There they were. It had come about more easily than I had expected. I had cried out for Nat so long, yet I had dreaded his return. That was the way things were,—simpler when they happened than when one awaited them; harder, perhaps, but always simpler.

They had brought presents for all of us. Their trunks and boxes spilled out gifts along with Rissa's cloaks and dresses and

underwear that looked as if spiders and not human fingers had worked the embroidery and scallops. There were yards of deep blue taffeta for me that mother said was too grand except to be married in, and a silk shawl, patterned with bright flowers and queer feathered birds, and open-work stockings. Mother was impressed, though she would have liked something more practical. But Nat brought me what I liked best, a little square music box with painted bluebells on top. It could play three tunes through, —a march, a waltz and a polka.

"Dick Halter and I chose it for you in Switzerland," he explained. "We must have played everyone in the old fellow's shop before we could decide. It's the same waltz we had at Rissa's reception, remember?"

"Yes, I remember,—" I couldn't manage to say any more.

It stands now on my dresser. The tunes are as gay and precise in their tinklings and the bluebells as bright on the cover as that night he put it in my hands.

I helped Rissa with her unpacking and though I still felt the barrier she had set up between us, whenever our talk turned on Nat a chink seemed to open in that wall.

"He's better," she told me. "Oh, but I was scared about him that winter after father died. Dick shouldn't have let him overdo on that walking trip. Nat'll always be frail and have to consider himself. That's father's legacy to him!"

An edge of bitterness came into her voice. Mother had been right in saying she was one to carry old grudges to the grave.

"Does he still have those heart rackets?" I questioned, "The kind he used to?"

"Sometimes, I guess he always will. But the doctors over there think it's the kind that won't,—" she broke off and her face sharpened at the word she couldn't bring herself to say, "that needn't get bad. They think it's some kind of strain to his nerves that comes when he overdoes. I can't remember the name they called it, and anyway Nat did pick up, as soon as they let him go on with his music. He can't stand it if things or people get between him and that."

"Then it sort of carries him along?"

"Yes. I almost think he'd go crazy without it. That comes of his being a genius. They all say he is."

"We always knew."

"He's only had some short things played, but even from those anyone could tell. They're going to be published over here soon. If his 'Ship Symphony' could get a hearing he'd be made." She sighed with her arms full of crackling taffeta flounces. "I wish it didn't cost so much. Everything's expensive that really matters."

We were standing by her bedroom windows that faced the Creek and those miles of dismal stumps, which a scrub growth of blueberry and alder was beginning to cover. It would be years before there could be green over the scars. The farther shore and water front had been divided into house lots; new cottages were going up and more would be staked out. Downstairs the spruces hid them, but from above the change was plain. She knew as well as I that it was her doing.

"It's a sight," she admitted suddenly, "but I don't care. It was the only way and I'd do it all over again if I could, The Folly and all."

"But you can't touch that for another ten years," I reminded her, "you're only twenty five now."

"I know. Trust father for that. Mr. Drake's got interested in Nat though," she went on, "I didn't put up with Will's everlasting proposals for nothing. No, I'm not planning to marry him, but things are coming round, you'll see."

Mother was curious when I reported that part of our talk to her later.

"She gets her way with anybody she sets out to win," mother said, "look at the way Henry Willis is giving in to her. But I guess Will Drake's given her up. Their coachman told Ed Phillips last week he was going to marry a New York girl."

"I wish she'd take Dick Halter."

"Well, she always had the look and ways of an old maid to me, no matter how many beaux she collected. She turned her

affections on Nat when she was young and she's the kind to hold on like grim death. Not that I blame her for it, the way things were, but she puts me in mind of some vine that fastens on the wrong thing at the start. When the time comes to branch out, you can't pry it off for dear life, and first thing you know it's growing backwards."

"Nat's bound to go far," I insisted.

"Oh, I don't doubt that, but I always trembled for Nat Fortune since he was little. He'll never take the easy, middle path same's I hope you will."

The Folly was full of life that summer. People came clattering up the drive as they hadn't in years, even some of the neighbors who had blamed them hardest.

"Guess that pair have come round to their senses at last," I heard more than one say in the village. "Too bad the Major couldn't have lived to see it."

"They'd never have come back while he was alive."

"Maybe not, but I guess they've seen enough of the world to think the better of Little Prospect."

But I knew all along that settling down in Fortune's Folly was the last thing in their minds. On the first rainy afternoon after their return Nat confided some of their plans to me. Rissa was over at the Drakes' place, but a slight cold had kept Nat indoors. He had been at the piano since morning, playing passages over and over, or stopping to set down elaborate patterns of notes on his sheets of lined paper. The piano and floor about it were littered with them when I went in with a cup of tea.

"Mother and I thought a hot cup would do you good," I explained. "You've been at it so long, aren't you tired?"

He started as if I had roused him from sleep and I saw that his face was white as the ivory keys. But in spite of the dark hollows about them, his eyes had the quick, living look they always wore when he gave his whole self to his music.

"And you never came in for your dinner," I told him, "it's still there, cold on the table."

"I didn't hear the bell, Kate," he straightened up and left the

piano bench. "I struck a snag on that part this morning, now I think I've got it, and I do seem to be hungry."

He made me fetch another cup and when I came back with it, he had set a match to the fire and was on the rug before it. He beckoned me over, but first I gathered up all the scattered music sheets and laid them in a pile.

"It's your symphony, isn't it?" I ventured.

"Yes," he nodded over his cup and the steam made his face look dim and wavering behind it. "There are some parts I couldn't get just right before. I guess I needed to come back here again,—it's about a ship, you know, and the sea and this place."

"And those hammers at the launching. You wrote once they were beating for you again."

He set his cup down and leaned forward, his arms hugging his knees.

"It's awfully queer when you come to think of it," he spoke slowly, and his voice mingled with the crackle of the fire and the rain that tapped in blown spatters at the northeast windows, "about the 'Rainbow'. Father staked everything nearly he had on her and lost. She's just a name now that only a few of us remember. I'd like to put her out of my mind after what happened, but I can't. It's as if father and grandmother and great-grandfather had set her on me. She's the family ghost," he gave a half-amused, half serious frown, "and I'm doing my best to lay her."

"Mother says we can't ever shuffle off what mattered to the folks that went before us," I told him. "She says it's bound to come out in us one way or another."

"She may be right at that," he shrugged and helped himself to another cooky. "Lord knows, I don't want to write music about what made me sick and miserable all those months. I remember father saying once that Fortune's had sea-salt and pitch in their blood. He'd certainly be surprised the way it's coming out in me."

"I don't know anything about music and symphonies, Nat. Tell me what it's like."

"Well," he rumpled his hair as he tried to explain. "It begins with this place, way back, I mean, in the old days before a tree was felled, when that old Indian could summon up storms with his tom-tom. You know how we used to think we could hear him beating it out in a big one?"

I nodded, amazed that he should have remembered.

"That's how I begin the rhythm that goes all through it. I use it again for felling trees and then for the launching. The drums have it hard in that part—" He broke off and went to the piano and began to thump out the old, unforgotten beat. Even played with one hand I could tell he had it right. I moved over to the piano, too, and stood quiet beside it in the darkening room. "You'd have to hear a whole orchestra doing it to get the feeling, but that beat isn't like any other in the world. I know I've caught it, and that rush when she takes the ways."

"And then what?"

"The voyage, that's the third movement, and the one I had most trouble with. There's so much to go in,—the cargo and ports, things I remember."

"The Muddy River Song?" I asked, "The sad one you brought back."

"Yes, that's just a bit for the flutes and wind instruments."

He ran his fingers over the keys and the room was suddenly full of it again. But he had made it still more wise and sad and lonely, like late light over water and the far winging of gulls and wild geese.

"But you've done things to it, Nat," I said, "you've made it different."

There were flecks of light in his eyes as he went on, glints like mica in dark rocks.

"And of course there'll be the storm, the one that nearly sent us to the bottom when I was laid up with a fever in my bunk below. I'll need everything I've got for that."

"But you'll let her weather it and come home safe?"

"Yes, the last is where they raise the loom of the land and see the lighthouse and the harbor again. That's got to be sort of spent and sad and deep—" He broke off again and let his hands drop from the keys. "You see, Kate, it isn't only about a ship and a first voyage, it could stand for everyone who was there listening,—their lives, I mean, going out with pride and press of sail and all the days and nights and winds and weathers before they can drop anchor. I guess that sounds foolish and far-fetched. I'm not good enough to make that show through. They won't know what I'm driving at even."

"They will," I told him, "even the ones who never saw an inch of canvas and don't know stern from bows."

He smiled and reached for my hand. We went back to the fire and the hearth rug. He was very tired, but I knew he was happy and buoyed up. His head was tilted back, resting on the seat of a low chair and his chin looked sharp and pointed the way it was thrust out. We were silent together for a long time.

"When are they going to play it?" I asked at last.

"Next winter I hope. At least there's a good chance of it. I played parts to some conductors abroad and they seemed to like it. Then Mr. Drake got interested when we were seeing so much of them in Cannes. He's behind one of the biggest orchestras in New York, and he's promised to push it with them. Dora says he always gets his way. If it goes through you must come on for the first performance."

"I'll be there," I said, "Didn't I tell you I would way back that time we went for Christmas greens."

I knew he had forgotten, though he nodded absently. But nothing could scatter our closeness in those few moments. We were like two raindrops on a window pane drawn nearer and nearer together till both merged in a single whole. I wasn't startled when he leaned across the hearthrug and laid his head down in my lap. I had known he would do just that. The thick darkness of his hair was under my hands. I traced the arch of his black brows with my forefinger.

"Kate," he said without lifting his eyelids, "you always make me feel right about myself."

My heart was going so hard I thought he must surely feel it. But he gave no sign.

"And you've got a very comfortable lap," he smiled and burrowed his head deeper. I could feel the bones of it pressing my flesh.

"Yes," I thought, "that is the shape of his skull. All the things that I love most about him are housed there. I have them here under my hands."

"Kate," he began again and this time his eyes were open, staring up dark and shining from folds of my dress that made his narrow face seem even thinner.

And then we heard Rissa at the front door and in a flash we were separate again, each of us at opposite sides of the hearth-rug. She burst in, her cheeks wet with rain and her cloak scattering drops as she flung it aside.

"I couldn't get away before," she began, then broke off. She was far from pleased to find me there, though only by her eyes and a tightening of her lips did she show it. "Why in the world don't you light the lamps," she added impatiently.

"I didn't notice it had got so dark," Nat said, "Kate and I had some tea here by the fire and we got talking."

"I'll get you a fresh cup, Rissa." I made to rise.

"Don't bother," she sank down in a chair and stretched her feet to the fender, "I had tea over there." She turned to Nat and went on talking as if I were not there, or more as if I might have been one of the chairs or the sofa. "Will's just back from visiting his in-laws at Newport. He wants us there for the wedding next month."

"I suppose you'll go," Nat gave a shrug, "just to make the bride feel uneasy and know she's second fiddle and always will be." He turned to me with a laugh and a lift of his eyebrow, "Will Drake may have got tired of hearing Rissa say 'no', but he'll never have eyes for any one else when she's in sight."

"Nonsense, Nat," Rissa tapped her bronze boots on the fen-

der, "we're through with all that, and no hard feelings." She spoke lightly, but still I guessed she minded losing his single devotion as any woman must when another steps in. "By the way, Dora expected you to come. She stayed away from something or other especially. I told her you had a cold and were working like a slave on your music, but she said she wouldn't let you off for lunch day after tomorrow."

"I'll go," he said, "but I wish you'd discourage her giving so many parties. I've still got so much to do on the score." He pointed to the pile of music I had collected.

"Well, you know Dora and her mother when it comes to plans. I saw Mr. Drake, too," she went on. "We talked about you, and he's still interested. He says he's bringing a lot of pressure to bear on them to do your symphony. I'd keep after him about it if I were you."

I heard Nat sigh.

"I can't help wishing the Drakes didn't have to be all mixed up with my music," he said.

"I wish so too, but what's the use of the musical ones going around and calling you a genius when they haven't the money to give you a start?"

I heard her as I carried out the tea-cups. I knew she would have worn herself out trying to get him money and praise. I envied her the chance she had to do for him. She had always had the power to give, as I never had. But she wanted to hand all the good things out to him herself. She couldn't bear to have them reach him any other way. Mother was upstairs and I was glad to have the kitchen to myself just then. I felt limp and solitary as I stood with the cups still in my hands. I couldn't bear to put them away along with the rest of that afternoon.

"I'll go," I said out loud to myself, "When the time comes, I'll go, too, no matter what."

They were very thick with the Drakes all the rest of the summer. I had plenty of chances to see Dora Drake and each time I did I disliked her more. You couldn't but notice her in any

gathering of people, for she was so quick and dark and pretty, like a gipsy, with the sure, soft determination of a sleek cat.

"She's a bold one," mother said, "but she knows how to cover it up with her smooth talk. She's after Nat, if you ask me, though she's smart enough to let him think it's his music she admires. Yes, I know all the signs."

I knew them, too, though I tried not to admit it to mother or to myself. Nat was taken with her. She had the knack of making him laugh and of diverting him with her gift of mimicry. I had no doubt she took me off too, when I was out of hearing. Nothing seemed safe from her keen, gold-flecked eyes. The summer people got up an entertainment to help the Hospital Fund, and everyone who went said she was the whole show, almost as good as a regular actress. She didn't seem to care much about that, though, she was used to getting praise along with everything else she wanted. Her father doted on her every move the way the Major had on Rissa. He bragged she could ride and drive and manage her sailboat better than her brother. She could, too, that was the truth of it, and she could be the best of company when she felt in the mood. She nearly always did when Nat was around. I couldn't blame him for being drawn to her young liveliness.

"Rissa's not too pleased," mother observed the day before their last week at The Folly when she had persuaded Nat to go off on an all day jaunt to Whale Back Light. "She wants to keep her hands on him till she's ready to let go, if she ever is. But that girl's more'n her match."

"Rissa's nobody's fool," I reminded her. "She threw them together herself so he can get his start."

"Sometimes folks kindle a fire they can't put out so easy. Nat's bringing her back for supper tonight, so you'd better go hunt me some more eggs."

My heart went down to my shoes at that. It always riled me to wait on the table when she was there, though I never minded serving others who might come. I was glad to go out with the egg basket so mother wouldn't suspect my feelings. Nat and

Rissa were cutting their stay short by a week and I had seen little of them lately. Jake and I had been at odds, too, the last time he came up. He was always trying when he knew those two were back. Altogether I felt badgered and low spirited as I hunted down the hens' favorite hiding places. I had enough eggs, but still I lingered in the barn. It was quiet and deserted and I found myself climbing the ladder to my old refuge in the hay loft. It came over me as I flung myself down on the hay, how I had cried there after the time Major Fortune discovered us at the piano and threatened Nat with terrible things. The hay smelted dusty-sweet as it had then. How long ago it seemed, that other despair and rage that could be all turned against the Major. I had given Nat my pearl handled knife to make up because I had felt responsible. I still did, in a different way. Everything worked out queerly, I thought, burying my face in the hay. I knew I was jealous of Rissa, and that Drake girl with her restless eyes that would never leave Nat alone. I hated to feel it in me like a bad spot in an apple, but there it was. Rissa came in to the dining-room to fix some flowers for a centerpiece. She unbent more than usual that night, though I thought she looked worried.

"I'd rather have been alone," she told me as we bent over the table together. "But Nat so seldom asks to have anyone, and the Drakes are pretty important to him right now."

I guessed she spoke more to fool herself than to make conversation with me.

"She's pretty," I said to let her know I wasn't taken in, "and full of fun. Nat likes fun as well as anybody and he had precious little of it when he was young."

She snapped off a dahlia rosette and crushed it between her fingers before she threw it into the fireplace. There was something jerky and tense in the way she did that. I couldn't help feeling that she would have liked to deal with their guest in the same fashion.

Dora Drake wore a dress the color of the garnet in my ring, with a ribbon of the same shade round her dark head. She was

forever putting it on one side to peer at Nat, like a bird demanding crumbs. And she got plenty of them,—lovely crumbs of give and take, and admiring, secret looks. I don't believe I missed one of those as I moved about the table.

"I tell you, Nat," she laughed across at him, "these natives round here are going to get the surprise of their lives when they find out you're famous."

Henry Willis, who did not often take part in their talk, looked over his glasses at her.

"Who do you mean, my dear young lady, by 'these natives'? I was born in Little Prospect and so were Nat and Rissa."

His rebuke was plain, but she never turned a hair.

"Oh, well, you know," she laughed, "Mrs. Smith in the post office and Hank Harding, and the Miss Joy, and that fellow who comes round with fish, the one that looks just like one of his own flounders."

No one spoke for a moment. I stood as if I'd taken root to the floor with the gravy dish in my hands. We all knew who she meant, even before she puffed out her cheeks and drew her face into Jake's very expression. Her voice, too, had taken on his heavy drawl. I felt myself turning hot all over and Rissa's color mounted. No one seemed able to answer, not even Nat.

"But you must know the one I mean," she was hurrying on, surprised that her play had fallen flat instead of fetching laughter. "I always say it's worth paying his awful prices just to see anyone who looks so much like what he's peddling. He's really priceless."

I knew I ought to get out of the room. I felt sure Nat and Rissa wished I were anywhere but by the sideboard. Still, I couldn't seem to move.

"You mean Jake Bullard," Rissa spoke up hurriedly. "Yes, we know him."

"Father always predicted he'd land on top round here some day." Nat was trying to pass it off easily.

"And he will, too!" My voice was steady and quiet, though I

had to set down the dish I held, my hands shook so. "Jake Bullard's got his faults and I know them, but he never mocked other folks behind their backs, no matter how queer they acted to him."

I have no recollection of the rest of that meal or how I served it. I was all churned up with anger and with remorse for disgracing Nat by my outburst. I wanted to run out blindly to the hayloft and cry. But I held off my tears by main strength, even when they all lingered to drink Nat's health.

"It's almost our last night here," Rissa said, "and Nat's symphony is finished and Dora says her father had word today the orchestra will play it sometime this season."

Nat was too dazed and jubilant by the news to speak.

"Yes, it's true," Dora Drake burst in. "He told me just as I was starting over here and Rissa wanted to keep it till now. You'll be famous before the year's out. I don't believe any of his sea-faring ancestors did better than that before they were twenty five." She looked across at Henry Willis.

"Here, Kate!" It was Nat who put the glass in my hands. I knew the light, cool touch of his fingers.

We drank to the Symphony and Nat's health while he sat, shy and happy in our midst, too absorbed even to answer Dora's beckoning glance. Rissa had risen and stood, pale and bright as one of the tall wax candles, her face soft with the certainty of Nat's future. It came over me when I tasted the sherry that the last time we had drunk a health in that room it had been for her twenty first birthday. I wondered if she was thinking of it, too, and of all that had happened since?

I vowed I should keep from tears till I had the table cleared, and I might have been able to if Nat hadn't made excuse to come back. I could tell he was troubled and anxious to make amends.

"I'm sorry Dora said that, Kate," he began. "You see, she doesn't know how things are. She didn't mean any harm, it was just her fun."

"I know," I swallowed hard against my sobs, "I didn't mean

to break out and spoil your supper for you. Only it just sort of came over me when she was taking Jake off that I'll be married to him by another year."

I began to cry then. I couldn't help it, I had kept back so long. I would have rushed to the pantry, only Nat wouldn't let me go. He put his arms round me and said comforting things. It made me more undone to have him so close. I could feel how hard and strong his arms were for all their thinness. I could hear his heart in quick beats there under my cheek and the rough cloth of his coat.

"You mustn't, Kate," he begged. "Nothing's worth your crying so."

My tears when they came were always hard and painful. He was frightened by them, but I couldn't tell him that they were less for those slighting words about Jake, than for what had been gathering in me too long to be denied. It seemed he must know what was pouring out behind those difficult gasps and tears. But I know now he never guessed. After awhile I quieted down and he wiped my eyes with his handkerchief and smoothed back my loosened hair. Then he said something I treasured even more than the music box he had brought me.

"Why, Kate," he said, "your hair smells like moss and leaves."

CHAPTER XXII

JAKE sold off another slice of the old Noyes' property that fall for three thousand dollars. He came up to show me the check, his face shining with satisfaction and sweat from his long row. It was his first really important deal and I never saw him so pleased.

"It's clear gain," he told me, "and the best of the place kept for us besides. I'm on the make now and we can go ahead with our plans."

I hardly knew what to say now that our marriage was a certainty. We had had so many delays and set backs that I had come to expect them. Our wedding day had come to be like a distant hill that seems to retreat as one travels towards it. But now that it was right ahead, I felt a queer mixture of dread and relief. Nat was dearer to me than all the rest of my world put together, but because I knew and accepted this, I knew that the sooner I left The Folly and took up my separate way, the easier it would be for my peace of mind. I would be a good wife to Jake, and we had the place to turn to and work for. It wasn't as if he had ever wanted another kind of love, I reasoned, so he would never miss it. I could root myself again on those acres and maybe in time come to find other things as real and living as those which concerned Nat. I was very fond of Jake and after all when you have kept yourself loyal to a person going on seven years it takes some tremendous upheaval to wrench you free.

I had mother to think of, too. She wasn't as young as she had been and I had seen too many changes all about me in those years not to know I must be prepared for more to come. Besides Jake was so jubilant over his sudden prosperity that he

somehow infected me. It did seem pleasant to be planning things together, and he gave in to me more than I had expected about several matters we had differed over before. Jake needed me in his own way and I clung to that when my heart was rocked by doubts, the way a skiff will be in the wash of a big vessel.

"Jim Harding's going to start the outside work soon's he has the last summer cottage closed," Jake promised the first time we talked things over. "Then he can work inside along through the winter. He said he could build a brand new house for what it'll take to jack up the old one, but I told him you fancied it. It won't be long till spring, not after the waits we've put through a'ready."

"And winter's no time for you two to start in over there," mother agreed. "You'll need a summer to get used to it. I expect you've got the date all fixed in your minds."

"I kind of thought mid-April, if it suits Kate."

"April's a good time, I think, Jake," I answered.

He gave my hand a warm squeeze under the tablecloth.

"It's a luckier month than May is," mother told us, "I remember an aunt of mine used to say:

*'Married in May
Devil to pay!'*

But she never saw fit to tell me why."

We all three laughed and drew our chairs closer.

"There'll be room for you, too, over there, Mis' Fernald." Jake spoke with real feeling. He had always been fond of mother. "You know things may not always stay the same over here to The Folly."

"Change comes to all," I thought mother looked suddenly anxious. "But I can hold on awhile yet. I don't like cluttering up young folks when they're getting a start. They've a right to spoon and spat as they see fit."

I walked down to the shore with Jake and watched him pull

away across water that was silver as a sheet of ice. A feeling of frost was in the air and the mingled smell of low tide and fallen apples. In a few moments the sun would be dropping behind Jubilee Mountain, but it struck into the spruce woods as I set my feet to the path, touching those brown trunks with peculiar light. They burned red as if each were a hollow shaft of fire. It comforted me somehow to think that I must cherish the store of fire hidden at my own core, even though I banked it with ashes as housewives did at night for prudence's sake.

Cousin Martha came up and stayed awhile in November to help mother make my wedding dress from the blue taffeta. They used one of Rissa's for a pattern and had me worn out with long and anxious fittings. It had big puffed sleeves and for once there was plenty of goods for a full skirt. Mother wouldn't follow the low cut of the model, but the neck was open with lace and shirring and the bodice fitted tight as a glove. It was a beautiful blue, the deep color of gentians, and it did become me.

Jake was busy helping with the house and came up often to report. He wanted me to wait till the new floors and the plastering were done. I was to have the say when it came to the sink and the cupboards and the paint and wall papers. Nothing in Little Prospect pleased me and when there came a spell of mild weather in March Jake and I had a whole day of shopping in Rockland. We got there before noon and went about together doing our errands. He wouldn't let me spend a penny of my own money for the house, though I had drawn out the hundred dollars the Major had left me and had it firmly pinned under my dress front. It was fun picking out the flowered paper I had set my heart on, and a striped buff for the parlor. We bought a set of dishes, too, blue and white, with weeping willows and peaked bridges on it, and a pair of china dogs with gold baskets in their mouths to go on the mantelpiece. He was smiling and indulgent with me the whole time, even when I turned reckless about the round beaver muff that I didn't really need, but which took my fancy.

"I guess a girl's got a right to be foolish once in awhile," he

said watching me finger its softness. "You don't get married every day."

It was growing dark before we got on the road again in the borrowed wagon, with all our purchases heaped behind, except for the muff I held fast to. We sat together on the seat under a blanket that smelled of hay and horses.

"Jake," I reminded him as we passed the great closed shape of the "Skipper's Inn" where the ship-yard used to be. "Do you remember the first time we ever drove this way? When you came to meet us with the Fortune horses?"

"Seems like a hundred years, don't it?" he returned.

"Yes, it does. You were twelve and I was ten and now we're twenty seven and nearly twenty five and going to be married. It's queer the way things turn out."

"Nothing queer about us, is there?" He laughed and leaned to kiss me.

We were both too tired to talk much so we drew closer, glad of the warmth of one another's bodies as we had been on that earlier drive. The water was pale and tossing in the chill dusk; the islands roughly humped, and beyond them Whale Back Light, clear as a low hung star. There they were, unchanged and enduring, but we two would never be children watching them again. *Clop-Clop, clop-clop*, the horses' hoofs hammered on the frozen road to remind me of other hammers, long silent now except to a few remembering ears.

It was a few days later that Henry Willis told me he had sold off most of the Major's remaining investments to help Rissa out. I was surprised that he should have confided in me, but he seemed to more of late, perhaps because my approaching marriage made me seem older to him. He had raised the money against his better judgment, he said, but he couldn't very well refuse Rissa when she explained that Nat's whole future depended on it. The year in New York was costing more than they had expected, Rissa had written. Nat had to meet important people and go about where he would be helped in his career. It cost more to live there than in Paris, though she tried

to be economical. Henry Willis shook his head at that. We both knew that neither one of them had any sense about money. They couldn't think in terms of dollars spent according to dollars coming in.

"I couldn't very well stand between the boy and his chances," Henry Willis sighed as he folded the letter again, "but I wouldn't like to meet the Major right now and tell him what I've done. Rissa's so sure that everything will be smooth sailing once Nat's made his mark with that symphony of his. Maybe she's right. I'm sure I hope so. But it seems a risky business to me, and Nat's health has never been reliable."

I tried to reassure him and we felt more certain after Rissa sent some newspaper clippings that mentioned Nat. There was a blurred picture of him in one, with "Promising young native composer" under it. I couldn't help wondering how Dora Drake liked to see that word in print. Some of the phrases I can still remember, the one that said:—"Although still in his twenties, young Mr. Fortune's work shows remarkable maturity", and "There is freshness and promise in this slight group of sea songs. Nathaniel Fortune will bear watching." Rissa wrote a letter at the same time that sounded almost as jubilant as her early ones from Paris. The Drake family figured prominently in it and they were evidently seeing a great deal of them. Mr. Drake being so influential had helped. He had introduced them to ever so many people, though she added that she and Nat were living very modestly in "an apartment" on Gramercy Park. I gathered that this was the floor of a house with a big parlor where Nat could have his piano. A woman came in to cook for them, but it didn't sound to me as if they were there for many meals.

"I hope she won't wear him out with too much socializing," Henry Willis said when I gave him back the letter. "She's got her father's ambition, but I'd say it was safer to pin all your hopes on a vessel than one human being, and it doesn't seem as if you could risk everything on one winter any more than on one voyage."

"Well, Dick Halter's coming back soon," I reminded him.

"Rissa says so, and he's got lots of sense about things. I guess he'll kind of keep an eye on them."

It was a day or so after our shopping expedition that word came about the date of Nat's symphony. Rissa had been too busy to let us know earlier and now it was set for the twenty first of March, my birthday, which she had forgotten in all the excitement.

"I hardly suppose that Henry Willis or you could come on to hear it [she wrote]. The journey is so long, especially this time of year, but Nat wanted me to ask you. He is too busy to write letters. They keep him working all day and half the night and lately he has been going over his score with the orchestra. They have decided to let him conduct it himself, which is a great honor for anyone so young."

I had no notion what "to conduct" might mean, and "going over his score" only put me in mind of poor cousin Sam getting even with the Major. But my mind was made up even before I came on a postscript scrawled on Rissa's last page by Nat's hurried pen:—

"It's really coming off, Kate, and I'm too happy and frightened to believe it almost. You said you'd come once and I want you to be there for old time's sake. We can take you in if you don't mind sleeping on a couch in the parlor. Oh, you'll love the way the drums sound in the launching part,—Nat."

I laid his words to my cheek all alone there in the chill of my bedroom. He hadn't forgotten and he wanted me there. When I had calmed myself down a little I went over to Henry Willis who was laid up in his room with a bad attack of rheumatism. He had heard, too. A letter from Rissa was lying on the quilt that bundled him as he sat by the fire. He kept taking off his spectacles and polishing them in the old pleased way. But he had no thought of going to New York. I could see his amazement when I announced that I meant to be there.

"You must have taken leave of your senses, Kate," mother

exclaimed when I burst into the kitchen with the news. "Why, you can't go off there all soul alone in winter, and it costs all of fifty dollars just the fare without meals or night's lodging on the way."

"I don't care if it does," I insisted, "It's Nat's music, mother, and I'd go if I had to walk every step of the way."

"Well, you give it a night's sleep." She peered at my flushed face a little anxiously. "You'll see things more sensible by morning I guess. Remember your own wedding day's only seven weeks off."

But I was even more set when morning came. All those next days were hazy to me, though I went through the round of housework as well as ever. Mother kept at me about it. She had never seen me so set before and she couldn't understand what had got into me.

"I guess Jake'll have something to say about it," I heard her tell George more than once. "He'll never let her go traipsing off."

"That's what I say," George agreed. "She had me fetch that old valise down from the attic yesterday and I humored her, but I says to myself, 'You'll be lugging it back inside of a week!'"

But they were all wrong, for I went ahead with my plans and all their protests slid off me like rain. I dreaded to tell Jake and I stayed awake nights in bed planning how I should put it to him. We had a spell of rain that kept us from seeing each other for the better part of a week, but at last I got a lift down to the village and hunted him out in his boathouse where he was busy painting his sloop.

"What's up?" he asked, startled to see me there in the middle of a weekday afternoon.

I had meant to lead up to it carefully, but somehow I couldn't. I had to blurt it out all at once, while he stood there with his wet brush dripping white paint on the floor between us. I had sat down on a barrel to keep my knees from shaking. When I

was through explaining he put the brush back in the can, wiped his hands on his overalls, and came over to me.

"Now, Kate," he said, just the way mother had. "You're talking awful foolish. You must be crazy to think of such a thing."

"No," I said, trying to be patient and explain it all a different way, "I'm not crazy, and I've got to go. You see, Jake, it's a promise I made—"

"Who to?" He frowned and stuck out his jaw in the way I always dreaded to see.

"To Nat," I spoke up real level and quiet, "and to myself."

"I thought as much." He pushed back the heavy tow colored forelock that had fallen into his eyes. "Look here, Kate, you promised me things, too, and you're going to promise a lot more pretty soon. You'd better remember that."

"I do, Jake, but that hasn't got anything to do with this."

"It's got plenty," I could see his knuckles show white and knobby under spatters of paint. "I won't stand for any such nonsense from the girl I'm set to marry in another month. You can't go streaking off and take up with that pair."

"I didn't expect you'd understand why I wanted to go," I went on summoning all I had into my words. "It's something between Nat and Rissa and me and I promised it long before you and I ever started to keep company together. 'Tisn't as if I'd have to put off our wedding to go, and it's my own money that I've got a right to spend. You've got no call to act as if I was doing something wrong."

"I've told you I won't stand for it," he half turned to go back to his painting, "I guess that's about all there is to say."

"No, Jake, it isn't." I got off the barrel and took him by the arm. I didn't give a thought to the wet paint on his old clothes. "You've got to hear me out. It's seven and a half years since we started to talk about getting married and that's a long time to wait—"

"I guess I know it." His face was purplish with anger and cold. "You don't need to stand there and throw it back at me."

"I never nagged you about it before and I'll never mention

it again. But you know it isn't easy on a girl seeing the rest all get started." I knew that must have cut him, though he gave no sign. "I didn't say a word that time you put your money in Will's business or when you bought Little Heron Island. It was yours and you had a right to, the same as I have now."

"It's not just the money part," He shifted from one foot to the other, though his face stayed set and hard. "It's you and those Fortunes. I won't have you running after 'em the way you always did. You know I hate 'em root and branch. I thought you'd got clear of that pair."

"You can't get clear of people you're fond of and been close to when you're little. I couldn't be clear of you, Jake, after all we've been through together."

But he brushed that aside with a jerk of his head. He was really angry now. I knew all the signs.

"I've stood a lot from you, Kate Fernald, first to last. I mean all this foolishness you picked up there at The Folly, and the airs you put on over the rest of us. You think you're better'n I am because you can talk and act different."

"Jake, I don't. I never set myself up to be a Fortune, just because I picked up what you call foolishness doesn't mean—"

"I've got more sense'n you give me credit for," he broke in. "I can see and hear plenty."

"I don't know what you think you see or hear," I heard myself blaze away at him till it seemed as if the air was crackling between us. "And I don't know's I care much the way you're acting now!"

"Fortunes mean an awful lot to you, don't they?" His wide mouth had drawn into a sneer. "'Specially Nat and that music of his you're always carrying on about. What's he to you anyhow?"

The cluttered boathouse and Jake's darkening face grew blurred. My own answering voice sounded far and shrill out of the haze.

"He's everything to me, only not the way you mean. But I'm going to hear his music and see him stand up in front of all

those people. You couldn't stop me. Everybody in Little Prospect couldn't if they tried."

"All right then, I won't try to." Now that my eyes had cleared I saw how white he had grown round the mouth. "Go ahead, if you want to, but you needn't think you can come back to me afterwards. I won't take his leavings."

I backed away as if he had struck me.

"Get it straight," he was going on, "if you go, I'll know where I stand."

My lips felt dry and withered when I ran my tongue over them. I stooped and picked up my muff from the floor and shook off the shavings that clung to it. I told myself that the moment had come,—that stillness before the felled tree crashes; the instant a curled wave hangs poised to break. I felt suddenly calm now it was upon me. Jake meant certainty to me, comfort and affection, and a home and children,—all the things I had looked forward to and wanted, at least, all but one. It was Fernalds against Fortunes again as it had been years ago when Jake laid down the law to me about the fire on the "Rainbow". This time I put Fortunes first and ran past him out of the boathouse.

I never stopped running till I was at the foot of schoolhouse hill. Then I had to drop down on a rock by the roadside till my knees grew steadier and I could breathe without a sharp pain in my chest. A team passed and the driver offered me a lift, but I shook my head and plodded on the rest of the way. The March light was beginning to fail and there was a thread of new moon over the Narrows. I had to notice them and the way the willows were swelling at the edge of the swampy place. Sometimes I heard myself mumbling over those hard things we had both said, and sometimes I just made little cheeping noises, the way meadow larks will when the mowers have trampled their nests.

Mother looked scared when she saw me come in. It was the next day before I could tell her about our quarrel, but that night I wrote Rissa and began to pack my things for the journey.

CHAPTER XXIII

ALL the stages of that long and difficult journey are like snatches of a dream to me now:—George putting me aboard the packet; the last of the familiar islands dimming behind us; the second mate who remembered me from district school days and who conducted me next day to the hotel near the station in Boston; that wakeful night of cinders and grinding wheels just the other side of my window; another train rushing me through strange countrysides for hours; Springfield, Hartford, New Haven, Bridgeport and names the conductor shouted that had only been words printed on maps to me before. And then coming out into that tremendous lighted place, hollow and humming with sound till I felt as if I had strayed into one of the mantelpiece shells we children had so often held to our ears.

Dick Halter was there waiting. Out of all the crowding, unfamiliar faces, his rose beside me, friendly and square, with the brown beard changing it hardly at all. The warm strength of his hands as he took the heavy valise out of mine was comforting, and his eyes narrowed behind their glasses while he peered at me and smiled his slow smile. I don't remember what he said or what I said, but he led me out through all that crowd of people. Outside in the dusky bustle of the lighted street he signaled to the driver of the strangest rig I had ever seen, with the reins reaching to a man on top and just room for the two of us inside, behind a little half-door. I had to laugh right out when he shoved me in and took his place beside me, and he laughed too at the expression on my face.

“It's the queerest buggy ever!” I told him.

"It's a hansom cab, Kate. I wanted to be the one to give you your first ride."

Once I grew used to the odd, jogging motion, I took further stock of him. He had grown broader and less shabby, though he still looked kind and thoughtful and a little rumpled. A soft hat was pulled down over his eyes, and he wore a loose, rough ulster that smelled of paint and tobacco in the most comforting way. He was studying me, too, whenever we passed by a street light.

"Rissa thought I might miss you," he said, "but I'd have spotted you anywhere, even in that hat. Don't misunderstand me," he went on seeing my sudden anxiety, "it's a nice hat, only I can't tell if your hair's still that rusty color it used to be."

"Oh, I guess so." We were clear of a tangle of other cabs and out on a street of magnificent stone buildings. The horse was trotting along in throngs of other carriages. Tall lamps on posts lighted the chill March darkness, endless lines of them stretched away before us on either side.

"We're on Fifth Avenue now," Dick Halter told me, "but most of the shops are closing up for the night. Pretty soon we'll pass the Drake's house. I'll show you."

I couldn't believe the places he pointed out could really be people's homes. They seemed more forbidding than Thomaston jail, though sometimes I caught glimpses of lighted halls when a front door was opened, or of maids drawing window curtains together on shining rooms. The sidewalks were running over with other people in a hurry, and the street was so full of horses and rigs, I thought of logs all choked together in some great river current in spring freshet time.

"It was splendid of you to come," he was rumbling along beside me in his low voice, "We could hardly believe it when your letter came. Rissa had to go to some tea or other, that's why she asked me to meet your train."

"And Nat?"

"Oh, Nat's been given over to that symphony of his for

weeks. I've hardly seen him to speak to. You may have to wait till tomorrow, but he's pleased you came."

I settled back more easily into the tilting seat. It was good to be able to speak of Nat to him.

"You must be worn out," he went on as the cab turned away from the Avenue into a narrower street. "We'll go out for a bite later, but I thought you'd like to rest first. Here we are at Gramercy Park."

It was almost quiet there after the larger thoroughfare. The houses were smaller and more homelike. Their brick and stone fronts faced the four sides of the open square with its bare trees behind high railings. He got out and paid the driver and carried my things up the steps of one.

"Wait till I can turn up the gas," he said, after he had unlocked two sets of doors.

Suddenly, as if by magic, light leaped out of dim jets on either side of a marble fireplace. It was a large room, though narrower than the east parlor at The Folly. Two long windows faced the Park, and a piano, differently shaped from the square rosewood one, shone darkly in a corner. The rack and top of it were littered with Nat's familiar sheets of music. His velvet house-coat hung over the back of a chair and Rissa's belongings were strewn about, too,—her work-bag and writing case, and a book, face down to mark its place. A jar of early spring flowers, narcissus and jonquils made the whole room sweet as we came in. Dick Halter set down my valise in the hall and helped me take off my coat.

"You're shivering," he said, tossing it down on a low couch covered with an India shawl, which I guessed must be what Nat had mentioned in his letter as my sleeping quarters. "Come and get warm."

He shook some coals on a small grate fire, and I was glad to sink down on a chair near it.

"I tell you what we'll do," he was going on, "We won't go out to dinner. There must be something we can find to eat here."

He left me and went off down a long hall. Presently he called

and I found him in a cramped kitchen, about half the size of our serving pantry.

"There's coffee here anyway," he said, "and bread and eggs and milk. I'll go round the corner and pick up something more. You'll have time to rest before I get back."

I was glad to be alone and make myself clean with the water that came miraculously hot from the brass taps. I rebraided and pinned my hair before the mirror in Rissa's bedroom, marvelling at the way her closet billowed with dresses and the shine of her silver backed brushes and scent bottles. Nat's room was dark across the hall. I felt my way in and stood with my cheek against the wooden wardrobe. It was alive with his presence and I dared not trust myself to stay long. When Dick Halter returned with his arms full of paper bags I was measuring coffee and taking down cups. I wasn't used to the stove, but he helped me light it and everything I remarked on seemed to set him off into gusts of laughter. Between us we managed to get together a real meal, what with the cold meat and rolls and cheese he had brought.

"I've learned to cook, too," he told me. "You wouldn't believe how handy I've got to be in my studio. I'll take you over there tomorrow, but all my pictures are at the exhibition. I'll take you there, too."

"All right," I agreed, "unless Rissa or Nat want me."

I didn't know then how busy and important Dick Halter was getting to be, with people waiting to sit to him.

We brought our supper in to the parlor and spread it on a table we cleared of books. I was half famished, not having eaten since breakfast, and that coffee took some of the chill and strangeness away. He warmed me, too, with his kind questions and the interest he gave to my answers. Yes, he told me, things couldn't have worked out better for Nat. The group of sea music had been noticed and praised earlier that winter. People in musical circles were watching him. Everything waited now on the sort of reception they gave his symphony.

"Music's not like painting," Dick Halter looked grave as he explained between mouthfuls. "In my line you can peg along by

yourself till people find you out. You don't need a whole orchestra of musicians to put over what you're trying to say."

I had never thought of that and told him so.

"You see, Nat has to stake everything on one night when they come to listen," he went on, "My pictures are right there on the canvas once they're painted. It takes money to be a composer and even if he makes a big success three nights from now, it won't pay enough to keep him through a year. Sometimes I wonder how he's ever going to make out, unless one or the other of them marries money."

He broke off abruptly and I knew he hadn't meant to say so much.

"Rissa's had chances to," I reminded him. "I guess she'd never put money first."

"I hope not," he set down his empty cup and felt for his pipe, "but they can't go on forever like this. I sometimes think if he married, she would. There's that Drake girl, but I can't see him tied to her and her family. Not but what she's willing, only I want to see him producing more stuff like this. I'm not musical, but I know the real thing sometimes, and you will, too."

"I've always been sure Nat would be great someday." I leaned forward across the little table. "Back in Little Prospect there was an old woman who told us so when we were children. She made us hold her lucky stone and when he did she said he'd spread his hands out in a high place, and there was something about a black stick and how he must put his faith in it."

"That's funny," he said, "you'll see why when he leads the orchestra." He smiled at me through the smoke from his pipe. "I'd like to paint you, Kate, the way you looked a minute ago, telling me about you three when you were little. I don't wonder that fellow Jake wants to marry you. Let's see, Rissa said your wedding was coming off soon."

The words I summoned to answer him, stuck in my throat. If I could have poured out the story of my break with Jake to anyone it would have been to Dick Halter, but just as I floundered to begin, we heard a key turn in the door.

"Hello. Did Kate get here?" It was Nat's voice, and there he stood, very tall in his long, fur-lined overcoat, with his face pale above the dark collar. He flung it on a chair along with a music roll and walking stick that clattered to the floor.

"Kate," he was saying, and I could feel his warm breath on my face, though his hands were like ice in mine, "you did come,—all that way. Somehow I was afraid you wouldn't."

"But of course I did, Nat, you ought to know that."

"Bless you for it anyway." He gave me one of his high, quick looks before he slumped down by the fire. "I'm dead tired," he went on, holding his hands to the warmth, "and famished."

"But what are you doing here?" Dick Halter questioned him. "Rissa said if you got off from the rehearsal before eight you were going to meet her at some place or other."

"I couldn't seem to face a lot of people tonight, and when I saw lights I knew you and Kate must be here. Don't send me out in the cold again. You won't make me leave my own fire and food, if there is any, will you, Kate?"

He spoke so plaintively we all laughed and I went off to make him fresh coffee. When I returned they were both smoking and talking together. Nat lit one cigarette after another, tossing them aside in careless haste only half smoked. He scarcely tasted the food, but he drank my coffee and some port wine he brought out from a cupboard. I was glad of the glass he poured for me. It went warm through my whole body, and eased me of the weight I had carried ever since the afternoon in Jake's boathouse. I felt suddenly glowing and light all over. It was as if I had been dragging a heavy anchor, whose chains had suddenly parted and left me free. I don't know what I said, but the sense of utter contentment and inward joy has never left me. I can see that elegant, untidy parlor yet, and its long windows and gilt mirror; the squat piano with its load of music; the jets of gas in their white globes, the coal fire, that cluster of spring flowers; the red glints in the wine glasses, and Dick Halter's broad, bearded face and Nat's narrow boyish one as I sat between them.

Sometimes I joined in what they said, or told them of my

journey and about mother and George and Henry Willis and his rheumatism. I told them how late spring was that year, though there had been so little snow all winter. Sometimes they talked of things that were strange to me as a foreign tongue. Their voices would sound dim and distant through the tobacco smoke. I drifted in it, too, the way a gull will in a fog that lies over familiar places. But I had only to turn to Nat to be reassured. Something warm and living was there between us, finer and brighter than a hair. I forgot Dick Halter, except for the slower tones of his answering voice.

Well, it had to end, like all such times. The clock struck eleven and Dick Halter had risen to leave when Rissa opened the door. She was in our midst in soft green velvet and grayish fur.

"What? You're all here?" She came over quickly and though she kissed me I saw her eyes go anxiously to Nat. "I was worried when you didn't turn up," she was saying. "We all waited and I left word at the Van Wykes and the Drakes, too, in case you went there. We went on for the last act of 'Tosca'. You'd have liked it, Melba was singing."

"I meant to come, Rissa," he apologised, "but I was so tired and then when I saw these two here. . . ."

"He was ready to drop," Dick Halter put in, drawing Rissa down to the sofa beside him and pouring her out some port, "so Kate and I persuaded him to stay. You know he wasn't sure he could get off."

"He was going to try to." She threw back her coat and leaned against the pillows. "People were asking for him. That Russian violinist and his manager were there. It would have been a good chance to get him interested in your sea-cycle, Nat. He might play them on tour."

"He will if he wants to for all of me," Nat shook more coals on the fire. "Look at Kate, Rissa, did you ever really think she'd get here out of the blue?"

"It wasn't very blue," I told them, "mostly gray, and *so* muddy!"

"I'm glad Dick didn't miss you at the train." She was toying with the stem of her glass and I noticed that her hands looked old,—years older than her face and the graceful lines of her body in the firelight. "I'd have gone to meet you, only I'd made this engagement weeks ago, and I never thought of your getting here three days ahead of the concert."

She spoke lightly, but I felt her annoyance through the words.

"I had to come when the boat left," I explained. "It only makes one trip a week this time of year. The next one would have been too late. I thought maybe there might be things I could do for you beforehand."

"Oh, never mind about that, only I'm afraid you'll have a dull time of it. I haven't got much time, and Nat's so busy I never see him, and Dick's got an exhibition in full swing."

"Yes," Nat put in with a smile, "I don't know anyone he'd have given an afternoon and evening to except you or Rissa."

"Oh, I didn't know." I felt all at once that I had been a bother to them. "But it's all right. I can stay right here till it's time for Nat's music. I only came for that and I don't need to go anywhere else."

Dick Halter was on his feet, preparing to go, but he came back at that.

"You leave everything to me, Kate," he said with a friendly pat on my shoulder. "I've got plenty of time for you, and you must see my pictures. Do you think you can be ready if I come by at half past ten tomorrow?"

"Oh, yes," I nodded, "but the morning will be most gone by then."

He grinned and Nat crowed delightedly.

"I'm afraid we don't keep Little Prospect hours," Rissa told me, "though Nat does have to be off by eleven."

She followed Dick Halter out into the hall. I saw how he hung on her looks and words, just the way he always had.

"Dick's getting famous, you know," Nat volunteered when we were alone. "He had splendid notices for his show. He's sold about half his pictures, besides getting commissions enough to

keep him busy till summer. He knows what he's up to, always did."

"And he says you do too. He thinks your music is really great."

"Thanks for telling me." He looked confused and pleased. "That means a lot from Dick. He's steady and sure, not all jerks and flashes like me. Yes, he goes along piling up work like a snow-ball. You'll be surprised when you see his portraits. I wish Rissa—" He hesitated and glanced towards the hall where we could hear their low voices. "I wish Rissa could care for him the way he does for her. You said once, that time father was so sick, and I couldn't seem to feel right about it,—you said we can't summon up feelings any more than we can the tide. You knew it ahead of me, but I've thought of it a lot since." He gave a half shrug. "Love's hell sometimes."

"Yes, it is." He hadn't expected an answer and I saw that mine surprised him. "And you can't do anything about it." He nodded and let the cigarette go out between his fingers. "But I guess," I heard my own voice going on with words I had hardly been aware of thinking. "I guess it's better to feel something too much, even if it spills over. I guess that's better than drying up slow from the inside."

He gave me a queer look, almost as if he were seeing me for the first time, and then he smiled and took my hand.

"That's one thing you'll never do, Kate," he said, "not till you're dead and done."

"Mercy," Rissa spoke to us from the door, "don't sit there talking about being dead and done, though it's what we'll all be tomorrow if we don't get some sleep. Here, Kate, you'll have to share my closet. I'll show you where to hang up your things."

CHAPTER XXIV

I REMEMBER very little of those three days and nights. Sleep was fitful on that parlor couch, listening to the unaccustomed city sounds,—the rattles and bumps and clatter on pavements, and the distant thunder of the overhead railroad that Dick Halter could never bring me to ride on. I used to stand for hours by the windows, watching the children who romped sedately in the March sunshine behind the Park railings, and the swarms of city sparrows that looked like scattered brown leaves when they swirled up from the gutters.

Rissa was kind and fault-finding with me by turns, and Nat tense as a taut fiddle-string the few glimpses I had of him. It was Dick Halter who buoyed me up by his unfailing kindness and good nature. He took me to his studio with its glass roof which he called a skylight, and I was glad to sit for him to sketch me. He was more quick and sure with his brushes then, but he had the same trick of squinting as he worked.

“This won’t be a finished portrait,” he told me as his brushes moved over the canvas, “just a rough study. You shouldn’t be painted indoors, Kate. You need sunlight coming down full on you. That’s a compliment, though maybe you don’t know it, most women couldn’t stand it,—too harsh and revealing. I’ll do a real one of you next summer, for I’m coming back to Little Prospect to do all the things I remember liking there.”

“It’s changed a lot, you know,” I reminded him, “all the new summer houses, and so many trees gone to make room for them. The Major would turn in his grave if he could see.”

“Don’t hide your hands in that muff,” he said, “they’re the

thing I like best about you, except for your coloring and the way you walk, as if you always knew the earth was under you."

"I don't feel as if it was here in New York," I sighed. "But that fog last night did kind of make me feel right. I could smell the sea."

"We'll go down to the Battery this afternoon," he promised, "and out to see the Statue of Liberty. There'll be gulls to make you feel more at home."

He was as good as his word and then afterwards he took me in to see his Exhibition. His canvases filled the four walls of an enormous room and I was amazed to see all the different sorts of people he had painted. The latest one he had made of Rissa in her green dress and squirrel furs faced the door and there was a red mark on the frame to show it had been sold.

"It's like her," I said, "only I like the one you did in the boathouse better."

My favorite was an old French fisherman in wooden shoes and a queer shaped cap, mending nets.

"He looks like old 'Lige Somes,'" I told him, "and he's got his hands held just right. That's the way I've seen Jake knot it a hundred times."

I saw two gentlemen and a lady who were standing near us give one another amused smiles when they overheard me.

"There's realism for you!" one of the men said.

Dick Halter paid no attention to them or to the others who were looking at his pictures. Later a man came and he introduced me to him, by my full name. The man complimented him, and afterwards Dick Halter explained that he owned the gallery. When we were going out those same people who had been listening, stared at us hard and I heard one say:—"Well, I'm glad we had a chance to see him, though he's not so much to look at. I wonder if she's a model. They're very dowdy sometimes with their clothes on."

No one remembered my birthday when it came round. I hardly did myself for we were all too full of the evening and Nat's music. People had been coming and going all day; boys

with boxes, flowers and telegrams, and friends of Rissa's, beautifully dressed girls and young men, who sent me scurrying behind the parlor curtains after I said that Rissa would be right in, and would they please sit down and wait for her by the fire. I hadn't known hours to drag so since I was a child.

And then it was evening and the man going about with his little ladder to light the lamps in the Park. I could just make out a waxing moon over the opposite chimney pots and I wished on it, over my left shoulder. Nat came in just afterward and I called him over to see.

"It's a good sign," I reminded him.

"I'll need all the good signs and portents you can find for me tonight, Kate," he said and his voice sounded hollow beside me.

Rissa was dressing in her room and I was afraid to light the gas jets, so for a few minutes we had the big dim parlor all to ourselves. I reached for Nat's hand and felt its chill in my warm one.

"You're not getting a cold," I whispered, "or one of those bad spells?"

"No, it's just that nothing can stop it now. I've got to go through with it."

"I expect you feel like getting under a featherbed, the way we used to in thunderstorms," I tried to comfort him.

"Well," he gave a jumpy, short laugh, "that's about it. I swear I feel like one of those little figures in our old clock at The Folly, when the time comes round,—out I'll have to go."

"Yes, that's how it'll be, and you'll go in again, too, afterwards."

"I'll keep thinking of that. Wish me luck, Kate, I know you do, but I want to hear you say it."

"Oh, Nat, I wish you—everything." The words crowded up in my throat so I could hardly get them out.

I felt his lips quick and hot on mine in the dimness and then his steps were hurrying along the hall to his room. I stayed behind, glad of the cold pane of glass against my pounding temples.

I was helping fasten the back of Rissa's new black velvet dress half an hour later when he appeared at his bedroom door, waving a tie at us, over a glistening shirt front.

"In God's name, one of you give me a hand with this," he called, "I'm all thumbs."

I never wanted to do anything so much as to tie it for him, but I let Rissa take it out of his hands. While she was knotting it deftly I turned back to her dressing table to let her have the last word with him. Then he was off. We heard his hurrying steps and the door closing with a bang. Rissa moved back to the dressing table. For a moment neither of us spoke, but I could see her hands shaking as she reached to pin on a cluster of white flowers. They fell to the floor and as I picked them up and gave them back to her, we were drawn together the way we hadn't been since the time she had come crying to meet me on the wood road. We were helpless, as we had been then. I bent impulsively to her and she did not edge away.

"Whatever happens tonight, Kate," she said, "we know that Nat is a great composer. And now there isn't anything more we can do,—not for five mortal hours."

"It must have been meant to be," I said against the softness of her hair. "If he hadn't gone off on the 'Rainbow' that time, this would never have been. That's why I had to come, Rissa, even if it did mean—" I couldn't bring myself to speak of Jake yet, so I wound up lamely, "going through pretty deep water to get here."

She thought I meant my long journey, and she gave me a smile and straightened the back folds of my blue taffeta that I should not be wearing at my own wedding.

"Here are some gloves," Rissa offered, "they'll be too small, but you can carry them. And this black cape of mine will do if you don't button it. Keep it round your shoulders so,—that mink collar is becoming."

We were back on the old footing again by the time Dick Halter came to take us out for dinner. He was in evening clothes and I could see he missed his slouch hat and loose coat. We went

to a place with glittering glass and silver and little pink-shaded lamps that put faint color in Rissa's cheeks. People stared as we went between the other tables, and I thought I heard someone say his name. But their eyes all followed Rissa.

"Beautiful," they murmured as she passed, and she was. In her black dress and long white cloak with ermine trimming she moved like some proud ship through a difficult channel. "Clipper-built" the Major had called her, and he would have said it again that night, for she bore herself with an air of sails and tapering masts, and arrogant prows.

I could hardly eat or listen to what they were saying I was so impatient to be at the concert hall. They kept telling me there was no need to hurry, but it wasn't till we were inside and settled in our chairs that I could draw an easy breath. It was a huge place, bigger than both the Little Prospect churches put together, with great crystal chandeliers and gilding, such as used to be in little bits along the prows and sterns of vessels, only much more elaborate. There were balconies on either side of a platform full of empty chairs. I followed Dick Halter and Rissa up some stairs into one of these. They called it a 'box' and explained that the Drake family would be in the other one beside us. There was no sign of them yet, but down below the plush seats were beginning to fill with people. Dick Halter made me take a chair where I could lean out over the edge.

"That's the stage where the orchestra will play," he pointed out, but I had guessed it already because of the harp, and the drums.

"Those big ones look like halves of hard-boiled eggs," I whispered to him.

"They're the kettle drums. Nat's going to work them pretty hard tonight."

Two young men in evening dress and a girl appeared. I didn't catch their names when Rissa murmured them, but I could see they all admired her. She had both young men talking to her at once, and she kept leaning out to bow and wave to

people below us. It was like a picture to watch her. Presently there was a stir in the next box and I knew the Drakes must be coming in. I recognized Mr. Drake's thick-set body, ruddy face and white moustache, and his wife in a dress that sparkled all over. I saw Will Drake's sandy head and a fair girl in blue beside him, and Dora, in red like a maple leaf, chattering away to another young man.

"Aunt Esther and the girls haven't come yet," I heard Rissa say anxiously. "I'm afraid they won't like sitting downstairs, but there wasn't room for so many of us in the box, and the girls would bring their husbands. Oh, there they are now, I'll have time to go down and speak to them before the first number."

I felt relieved they would not be sitting with us and I turned to the program. I scanned the pages till I found Nat's name and a piece in fine print about his symphony. It was divided into four parts:—*The Woods; The Ship-Yard; The Voyage; The Return*. It called these movements, but I couldn't make much of the rest, for it was all in musical terms that were beyond me.

And then the black coated musicians began to pour out on the stage, carrying their fiddles and bows; their cellos and horns and trumpets and flutes as carefully as if they had been babies. Nat's music was not to come till later, so I could give myself up to watching them. I had never seen more than three or four players together before and it may have been sitting above like that, that made them seem like the little figures of the men at the launching. I couldn't but think of it, they were so busy and precise in all they did. There must have been almost a hundred of those musicians, all softly scraping and tapping and tightening strings and making faint little windy noises when they blew.

"They're tuning up," Dick Halter whispered and I nodded.

It was a queer, creepy sound, and I loved it as I loved to hear birds through the drowsiness of morning sleep. The lights in the hall were lowered, but the platform was golden under its hanging lamps when a man came out alone and walked between the musicians to the front. People clapped and he bowed in answer to them. Then he turned his back and it grew still as the tomb

with every man bent to his instrument. He stretched out his hand and rapped on a little stand in front of him. Twice he rapped with a thin black stick. I almost cried out in the stillness when I saw that, remembering Old Lady Phibben's words.

Nothing mattered to any of us till it should be Nat's turn. I remember only a hazy torrent of sound that went on and on with times between when the musicians went away and people talked and walked about and Rissa went in to the Drake's box. I sat very still beside Dick Halter and neither of us said much.

"Now," he whispered as the men poured back to their places on the stage. "Nat'll be coming in a minute. Watch the door over there."

The man who had led them first came ahead, with Nat just behind him. He looked very slight and boyish, with his hair sleek and smooth the way Rissa had told him he must remember to comb it the last thing. They threaded their way through the musicians and when they reached the front the older man bowed again with Nat beside him. There was a ripple of hands clapping all over the house that sounded like waves on a pebble beach. Nat bowed, too, and I could see that he was dead white and his eyes black as coals in their deep sockets. Then the man handed him the stick and motioned him to the little stand.

"But he's conducting without any score," one of the men behind me was whispering. "I say, that is a feat."

There was a pause that seemed to hum, the way cold will on some still night of winter. Then Nat turned his back to us all and lifted the black stick. A blur came between me and the stage so that I heard, rather than saw, him give the two short raps. When it cleared, they had begun to play and I was no longer frightened. He stood there, young and slim and straight as a reed at the edge of a marsh.

Music drove him that night, as winds had driven Fortune ships to all quarters of the globe. He tamed it to his will, though not with wood and ropes and canvas. He was in full swing from the first moment, confident as any captain in command.

"He's all Fortune tonight," I thought. "It's a pity the Major couldn't have lived to see him."

Nobody listening in that hall could have felt just what I did then. I don't mean that they didn't know more than I ever could of what he was calling from all those fiddles and flutes and trumpets and drums. But there in the hot darkness I could feel fallen needles underfoot and the tossing greenness of those old trees across the salt inlet. It didn't matter that they were all gone; that I had seen them go down forever. That night he gave them back to me again. As I listened it came over me how everything must turn into something else sooner or later. Long forgotten rain and sun became at last roots and trunks and branches of trees, and these in their turn became buildings and ships and fire, or this rush of lovely, measured din his hands and brain had fashioned. Fortune pines and firs and spruces were once more reaching out to a new world. They had given their brown trunks and green branches that these bows might sweep over drawn strings. Their echo was in the flutes and viols and drums; in every note that kept those hundreds of watching faces rapt in this far-off place. The woods had not gone down for nothing. The earth had been laid bare, but only that their dark strength might pass into this other form.

I shook with thankfulness that this was so and that I had come to know it in Nat's hour of triumph. I need not lament that the woods had gone for so much lumber. It was a miracle and he had made it, as surely as the dead bark of Aaron's rod had been quickened to bloom.

Everyone clapped after that first part came to an end, but Nat seemed scarcely aware of it. Many of the players' faces gleamed with sweat as the men's had at the launching. But Nat stayed pale and serious. His hair was tumbled again in its old way and his head was thrown back on his shoulders. He stretched out his hand. I leaned forward with dry lips, knowing the next would be the ship launching. He beckoned, and I heard the first soft thud begin.

All the notices in the newspapers next day mentioned the

peculiar rhythm and power of that second movement. But I think that not even Rissa shared it with him as I did. How can I say in words what it was like to hear those hammers ring again out of the past? They had been ghosts to me all those years, as they must have been to Nat, and they beat on my heart as only lost sounds can. Yes, they were even clearer and more pulsing than they had been in my dream of them that stormy night in the empty schoolhouse. I throbbed in every fibre, and the kettle-drums beat on and on, deep and relentless, till I could feel the world itself, on its endless round through space.

It left me numb and shaken, though I knew the "Muddy River Song" cried again, lonely and bitter as woodsmoke in fall, and we were all like to go down in the roar and thunder of that tropic storm. That was when I seemed to hear the Major's voice telling me to write down in his book:—"Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts. All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me." I had never known the meaning till that night.

The last was quieter. The music thinned to a thread of sound that was still and shining with the calm brightness that comes to sea and sky after storm. Battered and spent and old, the "Rainbow" was back from her first voyage. I could see her as she had looked coming across the Narrows, with the Heron Islands to starboard and Whale Back Light on her port bows. She was at anchor by the Harbor's mouth, but she would never be the same ship that had set out with the sun on her new sails.

I didn't know people could take on so. They clapped and stamped and stood right up in the aisles. Even the musicians clapped or rapped with their bows and the other conductor came out and led Nat forward to take the applause. I could hear Dick Halter on his feet behind me, shouting "Bravo! Bravo!" Rissa's face shone as she leaned over the box. But I couldn't move or lift a finger. I stayed still, as a mole might in the glory of Judgment Day.

The next thing I knew we were home and people beginning

to fill the parlor and hall. I remembered hearing Rissa say she had asked a few to come back afterwards, her cousins and the Drakes, but there were dozens besides. Dick Halter dashed out saying something about "champagne", and I made for the kitchen where I found Rissa standing helpless. The woman who came to clean and cook had left a cold supper out, but it wasn't nearly enough.

"You go back to them," I told her, reaching for an apron behind the door, "I'll get to work here."

I tied it over my best dress and began slicing bread as fast as I could. My hands flew as I cut and spread and opened jars and hunted out food in a frenzy. I still felt dazed and uplifted, but it was a relief to go at those sandwiches and make coffee and help uncork the bottles Dick Halter brought. I might have been an engine for all sign of feeling I showed. Once I laughed helplessly, thinking of the loaves and fishes in the Bible story, and wishing our food could be multiplied.

"You'll have to go in and help me pass things," Dick Halter was saying presently, "I can't manage alone, and people keep talking to Rissa, so she can't move."

I followed him in, apron and all. I didn't mind that any more. It seemed right and natural to be waiting on people again. I got a place cleared on the table and went from group to group seeing that everyone was served. Some would go and then more would come, and you couldn't hear yourself think for the talking and laughter. "A tea-squall" Jake would have called it, and I must say it seemed like that to me. Sometimes I recognized a face in the crowd. The Major's sister was there, looking older and stouter in violet silk. She gave me a sharp look when I passed. Bessie was beside her, plump and stupid looking as ever, and Jane, in yellow satin, scowled as she recognized me.

"Did you see her, mother?" I heard one of them say. "I should think Rissa'd have more sense than to let her wear such an outfit. And she was in the box, too, can you imagine such a thing?"

I moved on with my tray of glasses, thinking how little it mat-

tered to me now what they said or thought. Everyone there took me for a servant, but I didn't care. Indeed it was a comfort to be one among all those strangers. Even Dick Halter was too busy to notice me. I heard him speaking something I took to be French with several foreign looking people, and Rissa was always the center of a group. She looked flushed and gravely happy, in a way I like to remember.

Mr. Drake was over in a corner talking to the man who had led the orchestra. He was older and more bald near to. He moved his hands when he talked and as I stood waiting for them to take their glasses, I caught some of his words.

"Yes, yes, I agree," his voice was thick and hesitant as if he thought in another language before each word, "a most fine and promising beginning. But still, it is only that yet. You understand me. I have seen how the fires they go out sometimes—so." He snapped his fingers quickly. "In art nobody knows,—it is time alone that tells us."

"But, my dear Sir," Mr. Drake began, "you can't think this is just a chance flash in the pan. There hasn't been such a reception in years."

"Well, I don't think," the other gave a half-apologetic shrug and again spread his hands, "I tell you I wait and see for myself. And," he smiled and took one of the glasses I offered, "I hope for much of him. Yes, I am very hopeful."

He must have seen that I was listening for he turned and stared at me with his keen, heavy lidded eyes. All at once I plucked up courage and spoke to him.

"Have you got that black stick here with you?" I asked. "The one you beckoned with?"

"My baton?" He spoke as if I had been a child though I stood an inch or two taller than he. "Alas, no, I regret."

Mr. Drake laughed out, curious and amused as he peered at me. He looked puzzled as if he remembered seeing me somewhere else, as indeed he had many times in church or on the roads round Little Prospect. I was glad when he moved away.

"What did you want with my baton?" the other went on, smiling kindly at me.

"Oh," I stammered, "I just thought I'd like to see it near to and maybe touch it. You see, I came a long way for tonight and I had a special sort of reason."

"I wish I might have had the honor," he bowed in a stiff, foreign way. "Tell me, the music, was it worth all that long way to come?"

"Oh, yes, you see, Nat and I, when we were little—" I was ready to tell him about the launching when a group of people surged in and swept him away. I collected all the empty glasses I could find and moved off.

It was then that I saw Nat. He had come in without my knowing and he stood, the center of a group, across the room. I had thought he would look tired and worn as he had when he left the house, but instead he seemed like a boy. No doubt or despair clouded his face then. I stood and watched him with the tray in my hands. Dora Drake pressed close to him on one side, and Rissa on the other. In their red and black dresses, they looked as different as two elements, as if he were caught between fire and iron. I couldn't but think of it at the time and afterwards.

There was no chance of his reaching me, or I him, with all those people between, but I waited till he should look up and see me. When he did, our eyes met and held each other's. I saw his lips move in answer to something Dora Drake was saying, but I knew he was waiting for me to give some sign. I nodded my head quickly and hurried off to the kitchen.

It was well on towards morning when the last of the guests left. Dick Halter lingered to help carry out the sticky glasses and plates and I plunged my arms into soap suds and hot water. Rissa moved about putting things to rights. I wouldn't let her wipe the dishes for fear of spotting her new velvet.

"Nat walked home with Dora," she spoke with impatience from the door. "Her father and mother went an hour ago, but not she."

"Well," Dick Halter soothed her, "a breath of air won't hurt him any. He won't rest till he sees the notices."

But Rissa went on being annoyed.

"She thinks she only has to whistle for Nat any time she wants him," she burst out. "I told her you'd walk back with her, but she made him go. Dick, I'm worried about those two," he had followed her out into the hall, but their voices came to me clearly as I rinsed and wiped. "It isn't as if she cared about his music really. She just wants him. The Drakes have done so much for us and I thought, in the beginning, there couldn't be anything serious between them."

"Now, Rissa, you'll only throw them at each other's heads if you show you feel this way. He isn't a child anymore. He proved that tonight without any doubt."

"But he is in lots of ways and she is, too. I wouldn't care if she had any sense."

"If she had he wouldn't take to her. Anyhow, Rissa, can't you leave it to them, and think of us. You said years ago in Paris that once he got started you'd think about marrying me. I'd say the time had come."

"Oh, Dick,—not tonight—please."

"How can I help it?" I had to strain my ears to catch their words their voices had dropped so low. "All of us keyed up like this, and you looking the way you do in that dress."

"But you know how I feel, I mean, how I can't seem to feel about you, Dick?"

"And I've told you it doesn't matter if we can just be together. One person always has to care the most, and that's nothing new for me. There's never been anyone else for me except you, Rissa. Now I'm getting ahead I can give you a decent kind of life."

"Oh, Dick, it isn't that—" Her voice sounded muffled as if she were leaning against him, and I hoped she was. "I ought to be able to love you, and I do want to, only—"

"Only there's Nat, I know. But he'll be going his own way soon."

"But he isn't ready to go his own way yet, that's just the trouble. Oh, I wish I weren't so tired and worried,—tonight of all nights."

"I shouldn't have spoken again, but I had to. Well, you go in and get some sleep and I'll be round about noon to see Kate gets that train. Good night, dear."

The door slammed and I heard Rissa go to her room, crying softly. I couldn't sleep after I had crawled under the covers of the parlor couch. It wasn't that I had overheard anything new to me, but their words had given shape to my hazy feelings. So I lay broad awake staring into the unfamiliar gloom, still warm with tobacco smoke and flowers and people's bodies. It was queer to think I should be where I was, bound to the lives of those two who were different from me as the farthest poles. My ears were strained for the scrape of Nat's key and his step in the hall. I knew Rissa, in her bedroom, must be waiting for the same sound. Why couldn't it all stay simple and easy as it had been when we were children at The Folly. No, not easy, for it hadn't always been that, but at least we could be happy in the moment then, not forever straining towards the next and the next. The key turned softly in the lock and Nat was there, moving towards the piano. I saw his dark shape against the faint gray of the long windows. He had forgotten that I was sleeping there, for he started at my whisper.

"Kate," he felt his way across to me, "you ought to be asleep."

I could make out the pale triangle of his face above me as he sat on the edge of the bed. By moving an inch or two I could have felt his body against mine, but I stayed still as a stone.

"I couldn't see you for all those people," I told him, "but I guess you know how I feel about tonight. Oh, Nat, I was like to have died when you took command there in front of everybody, and afterwards when they all clapped and called you out so many times."

He found my hand and patted it.

"Do you know what I was thinking, Kate," he whispered back, "just when it was time for me to go out?" He gave a low

laugh, remem·bering. "It was something your mother used to say about 'the little bird that sings in the morning the old cat will eat before night'. It seemed as if I was going out to be eaten up."

"Oh, Nat, what a thing to remember!"

"Wasn't it?"

"Well, you needn't have been so worried."

"There's always the next time, and wondering if you ever can do it again."

It startled me his saying that after what I had been thinking. I couldn't bring myself to answer him for fear of all I might say.

"Kate," he was speaking softly again, in a different tone. "I'm happy for a lot of reasons tonight, and scared, too. I wasn't going to tell anyone yet, but you're leaving so soon and you'll be married yourself by another month . . ."

I felt like a hollow tree lying there so near him, listening for the words I knew even before he said them.

"I'm in love, and she loves me, too. I wasn't sure till tonight. It seems almost too much to happen, people liking my music and now this. I couldn't even let myself think of it before, till I'd proved I was good for something. But now Dora knows. I guess you knew it was Dora Drake."

"Yes, I knew, and I hope. . . . I do want you to be happy, Nat."

"You're the first to know, but you won't let on to Rissa, will you? I'm afraid she'll mind at first, we've always been so close, but things can't go on being the same always, can they?"

"No, Nat, they can't."

"Well, good-night. I mean good-morning, there are the milk carts beginning." He caught up my hand again. "Why, your fingers are like ice."

"Cold hands, warm heart," I reminded him.

I don't know now how I ever happened to say that, but I did.

PART IV

CHAPTER XXV

AND so I came back to Little Prospect; just eight days since I had left it. Bitterness and despair were in my heart and sea-salt on my lips as I stood under the shelter of the pilot-house and marked familiar islands and headlands. I knew every ledge, every tree-thronged point and cleared field. I knew the shape of each farm and fish-house, and the white-washed tower of Whale Back Light in its cluster of buildings, set prim and stiff as some cross-stitch pattern I had worked myself against sea and sky. There were The Sisters, and far off Great Heron Island, with Little Heron just ahead. A new white sign-board had been raised on its sheltered side. "FOR SALE", I could read the words, as we swung nearer to pick up the red buoy. That was Jake Bullard's greeting as plain as if he had hailed me across the water. Over on the Old Noyes' point was another such sign in the field by the house that I should never live in.

"Well, he didn't waste any time about it," I thought, turning away from the sight of the new shingles and white paint.

Another sign hung out boldly by the steamboat landing:

Jacob Bullard—Real Estate.
Choice building sites—Shore
Frontage. Cottages and boats
for hire.

It was his answer to me and I knew it.

"Yes," George said when we were driving back behind his old plow-horse and he saw my eyes drawn to still another sign-board. "He's got himself plastered all over Little Prospect."

"He always meant to get on top that way," I said. "It's been on his mind for years."

"Look here, Kate," George gave me a sidewise look. "I don't know what you said to him 'fore you left, but whatever 'twas got right under that hide of his. He's got his back up, and I guess you might's well know now he's saying pretty mean things."

"About me? Well, he can if he wants to; only mother's bound to mind. How's she been about it, George?"

"She acts kind of battened-down to me." He let the horse take it easy on the hilly stretch. "After you went she was over to see Martha Jordan and the girls and I guess the fur flew. Anyhow she's been low-spirited since. Tell me, now, how did Nat's piece go off? Folks like it much?"

I tried to tell him about the concert, but after awhile we fell silent and he gave all his mind to steering the horse and wagon through the mud. There had been rains and the roads heaved with oozing brown that rose sometimes to the wheel-hubs. There was no sign of green yet. In the fields patches of snow still lingered; the woods were rough and dark like the horse's winter coat of fur. But brooks had overflowed their banks, and scores of unleashed streams had broken out on pasture slopes and ledges. The late sun touched them to threads of quicksilver and made the willow shoots orange and the birch twigs faintly red. Jubilee Mountain wore the smoky blue that always came just before April green.

We clattered over the bridge and turned in between the spruces. Even numb in spirit as I was I had to feel how good it was to breathe in the woody dampness, that was full of pitch and moss and needles. And there was The Folly beyond, its cupola shining and its columns fair and tall despite their flaking paint. Seeing it again in that moment I knew that I loved it,—not as I loved any living thing, but because I was bound to it once and for all. People might go back on you. They died or went away or cut themselves off with bitter words, but land and trees and sheltering walls wouldn't betray you like that. You could give yourself to work for them without fear of

hurt and despair. I didn't put it in so many words then, but I knew it, all in a flash, before I got down and went in to mother.

Those next months are hard ones to remember. I suppose we all go through such times,—when it seems the very life has died out of us, and only the pithless stalk is left in a world of pushing green. That was how I felt all that spring as I drove myself from one thing to the next in a frenzy of work. Mother couldn't hold me back no matter how she tried. I remember I took up the east parlor carpet on the April day when I should have been married to Jake. It was heavy work, moving the furniture and tearing up tacks before I could drag those breadths out into the sunshine. George was off in the cornfield, so I went at it single-handed. Dust flew in clouds about me as I beat with aching arms and the sweat running down under the blue handkerchief that tied my head. I could hardly bring myself to rest, for then I knew I might begin to think, and I only wanted to see the color come back to the dingiest places where the roses had almost been trodden out. They were bright at the corners and new looking where the furniture had stood, but the threads of the warp showed through in the breadth that had been by the piano, and there was a burned spot where Nat and Rissa and I had forgotten to put up the fender once, years ago.

"Oh, Kate," mother had come out to beg me to stop, "you'd ought not to do such heavy work, a girl like you."

I straightened up and looked at her there in the bright, strong spring light. I hadn't noticed before how her shoulders had rounded and her hair thinned to lustreless gray. I knew what she was thinking that made her face so troubled.

"It's all right," I said, "I'm real strong, mother."

"Yes, you are now, but you won't always be. Oh, Kate, we'd all ought to have been so happy today."

Her lips trembled like a child's. It was as if we had changed places and she had come running to me with some hurt to be comforted.

"Mother," I said, "you go on back to the kitchen out of this wind, and cook us something good for dinner. I'll be fierce for

food after I get through with this beating, and George could eat something beside what Annie gives him and you know Henry Willis said he might come downstairs this noon. No, don't you tell me what you're going to make, keep it for a surprise."

I beat on, only pausing now and again to wipe the dust from my eyes and let the sea-wind dry my face.

"Kate," someone else was calling my name, and a flash of brown darted out from the nearest spruce trunks. In a moment I knew it for Sadie's little boy Orion. "Hello, Kate Fernald," he called as he came on in his queer little home-made coat, "Mother's waiting down by the posts."

"Why, hello," I said and swung him up pick-a-back. "How did you two get all the way over here?"

"Express wagon brought us," he told me, his breath hot on my neck and his scuffed shoes stuck out straight through my crooked arms. "Tom's coming back for us by'm bye."

I knew it wasn't the regular way Tom Rogers drove his team and I guessed Sadie had been pretty persuasive to get him to take his horses through all the mud in Sprague's hollow. I saw her standing by one of the brick gate posts watching us.

"You put him right down, Kate," she called, "he'd ought to be ashamed to let you carry him, a great boy like that!"

His arms tightened round my neck and he ducked sheepishly behind my bandana. I laughed and set him on the post that had lost its urn-top.

"He's light's a feather," I said, "even if he has got to be most four years old."

"You always did spoil him," Sadie laughed. "Listen, Kate, I had a chance to get up and Louis was around to look after things. He's going to be awful busy from now on helping work on that new pier, and besides——"

"You remembered what day it was," I broke in, glad of an excuse to turn away and lift Orion down from his perch. "There," I told him whipping off the handkerchief from my hair, "you can fill that with cones. These are the biggest ones anywhere

round." He darted off and I faced Sadie again. "I never thought of your coming way up here, Sadie. You were real good to."

"Well, you were real good to me, Kate, when I needed it, and Louis says to tell you if you need that fifty dollars he can get it the first of next month. He's got nice feelings about things like that and he likes you."

"I'm glad. How're you making out?"

"Pretty good, only it's kind of hard going till summer gets underway. I'm going to help Miss Smith in the post office through July and August. Look here, Kate, you know if you want to come down and stay with us any time, you can. We can take Orion in bed with us and you can have that little room."

"No, I guess not, but thanks just the same. I'd be running into Jake and the girls and Cousin Martha too often, besides there's plenty for me to do up here."

"I should say there was in a big barn of a house like The Folly. Kate, it's all wrong, anything like this should happen to you. I could see Jake Bullard in boiling tar and not give him a hand out."

"Don't talk like that," I shook my head. "Of course I know what folks are saying. I've heard some of the things Jake and the girls said about me."

"They're nothing to me, only I call it a crying shame, Jake or no Jake. You'd ought to be married, Kate. I s'pose there isn't a chance you two could patch things up again?"

"No, there isn't a chance. I'll make out, Sadie, there's worse things than being single, I guess."

"Yes, but it's lonesome. I know. Here, Orry, you come back now, it's time we started over to Sprague's place. Tom Rogers said he'd pick us up there."

"You come back to the house with me," I said, "you know he won't be by there for a couple of hours." She hesitated and I knew what was in her mind. "Don't worry about mother, you'll be doing us both a good turn if you'll stay for dinner."

So we went back with Orion scampering ahead like a new kind of squirrel. After dinner when Sadie was showing mother a new

crochet stitch she had learned, I took him in to the east parlor and held him up to see the little figures come out of the clock.

“Dickery, dickery dock,
Woodsman, come out of the clock!”

I could feel his whole frame stiffen when the little gold door opened at last.

“Make them do it again, Kate Fernald,” he begged after it was over.

“But I didn’t make them come out, Orion,” I tried to tell him.

“Who did?”

“Something called Time. They can’t come out again for a whole hour.”

“Not for anybody in the world?”

“No,” I set him down, “not for anybody in the world.”

“I’ll come and see them soon,” he said, “maybe day before yesterday.”

“You mean day after tomorrow,” I corrected, “day before yesterday’s all over.”

But I didn’t laugh at him for that. It seemed to me that day before yesterdays had a way of getting mixed up with our tomorrows.

After they went away the house was very still again. Henry Willis was taking his afternoon nap upstairs and mother had gone down to Annie’s with her sewing. I finished tacking the carpet and dragging the furniture back in place and then I wandered in to the study across the hall. It was seldom used now, and everything there was the way the Major had left it. The big Bible was in its place on the desk and I opened it to Solomon’s Song. I hadn’t dared to read that since the night in the schoolhouse, and it was so bound up with my feelings for Jake, as well as for Nat, that I was fearful to stir up all those memories. But that time I never skipped a word, not even those that pricked sharpest through my shell of despair.

It is strange and painful to read verses that have struck sparks in the heart when the fires that they kindled are a heap of ashes. But it is even more strange to come upon what one has passed by without heed before, and have it suddenly become a cry torn from the very core of one's being. That was how it was with me, sitting there alone in Fortune's Folly on the day when I should have been a bride.

*"Stay me with flagons; comfort me with apples,
For I am sick of love."*

I knew it for my own, though the words were King Solomon's.

All those weeks I hadn't cried. My eyes had been dry and wide even in the darkness of my room at night. Even mother's bewildered pity and pleadings hadn't stirred me to tears. But that did. I put my head down on the old leather covers and let myself go. They were not easy tears. The marks they left on the Major's Bible still show how salt and blistering they must have been.

I didn't try to reason or think why that had taken such hold of me. But when my spell of crying was over I went outdoors and made for the orchard. The wind blew up fresh from the water and dried my tears. My face felt salty and stiff as kelp, and the damp ground was good under my feet. There wasn't an apple in sight, for those shriveled ones that had clung to some branch all winter had let go their hold in the last spring rain. The old trees were bare and brown and wind-blown in the afternoon sun. Some of them had almost doubled over on themselves, and some were flattened to the earth, and there was not one that the north and east winds had not marked and misshapen in all those seasons. Even the oldest, those that had only a branch or two left on hollowed trunks, were beginning to swell with buds. I laid my hand to the scarred bark of one, and it seemed to me I could feel the secret push of sap that would be blossoms soon, and then green and then yellow or red or russet.

I stopped in the barn on my way back to the house. George

was milking and I stood watching his hard brown hands coax the white streams into the pail.

"Well," he said, "Spring's 'bout here now I guess. Took a long time coming this year."

"I've been over to the orchard," I told him, "Buds are swelling already. It looks as if this would be a good apple year."

"Yes," he nodded, "if they was pruned and helped along some of those old trees would yield a lot yet. They're fine flavored, specially those early Snows and Northern Spys. They don't grow so big's the back country ones. Sea winds keep 'em small, but that's what gives such a bite. There's something to get your teeth in."

"I'm going to take a wheel barrow or two of loam up there," I said, "and put it round the roots. Maybe you could help me clear out some of the dead boughs."

"All right, I will tomorrow," he promised. "It's better to do it in the fall, but a little now won't hurt."

I had always worked about the place, but never as I did that spring. Every day I was out, rain or shine, side by side with George and his knobble-kneed horse. I flung myself at the work and my own strength amazed me. I had never been one to sit with idle hands, but this was different from what I had done in the past, and a fierce energy possessed me. Even George noticed it and had to hold me back.

"Watch out," he would say when I took my turn with the plow, "don't drive that furrow so deep. You must be aiming for China by the way you bear down. Take it easy, Kate."

But I couldn't do that, not even when my hands blistered under their hardening, or when my back ached after hours of bending and hauling. He felt uneasy seeing a girl go at such heavy work and mother was nearly distracted. I had to smile sometimes at the way she protested and warned me that it wasn't any kind of work for a woman to put her shoulder to. What was there to save myself for, I used to think out there in the April sun and wind? The trees and the garden and the house might as well have me, every inch.

"You forgot your hat again, Kate," she would reproach me when I came in to dinner after a morning with George in the potato patch, "I don't know what you'll look like by August with the freckles you've raised now in May."

"That's one crop I'm bound to have luck with," I told her, "but where's the difference?"

"Everybody'll notice on Sundays," she would sigh, "They say enough now without remarking you're losing your looks."

I knew what she meant. I dreaded Sundays and those curious looks I got before and after Church. I went down to Little Prospect as seldom as I could, for I felt stiff and self-conscious there. It was as if everything and everybody watched and listened to see how I was taking the change. Jake wanted them to think he was in the right and they did. It wasn't wise to start a grudge with Jake Bullard. He liked to make out that I thought I was better than he and the rest of Little Prospect; that I had always wanted Nat Fortune. Now that the word had come Nat was going to marry Dora Drake they laughed behind my back and talked about people that went too far and got left high and dry. I could guess all they said as if I had heard them. I knew their "I-told-you-so's" must be a satisfaction to him.

Jake, too, was giving himself to the place. I can see now that he turned to it to save his hurt pride. Through it he was determined to prove to me, and to himself, how little I mattered. Old Lady Phibben had been more right than she guessed. Jake and I did belong to that dark and gritty shore, bound to it by our differing needs. He wanted to take its power and strength to himself, while all I asked was to let it take mine. I couldn't help thinking, as time went on and we came to be farther apart, that for every bush and tree I cherished, he must clear and chop down ten times as many. Looking back as I can now, I see how it all began and that he had the upper hand of me from the start. Perhaps, if things had been otherwise, and we could have taken each other seven years earlier, our differences might have mingled, though I doubt that the ruthless and the fruitful can ever go hand in hand. Sometimes I must wonder about it, on

pleasant August afternoons when the harbor overflows with summer craft and the steamer unloads its crowd and the roads hum with motor cars, and think that if I could have loved Jake Bullard and lived with him, Little Prospect might not be the place it is today.

I dreaded the peak of that spring so! Always before I had run to meet the seasons. It wasn't enough to be abreast of that first faint green on fields and pastures, I must be a pace ahead, hunting hepaticas and arbutus out of melting snow before the earliest pussy-willow was out in furry gray. Always, till then, my spirit had beckoned to marsh-marigolds in the time of skunk-cabbage; to lady-slippers before dog-toothed violets were through blooming, and now I dreaded them. I wanted to keep them back, since I could not hide myself away from their too bright shapes. But I was powerless to stop their crowding, and so I moved, dull and clod-like, in all that shining surge. Say what you will, no single heart has ever fitted into spring's design. I felt it then and I know it now.

"I won't set foot in the orchard," I vowed when I knew the mist of buds would be taking those crooked boughs, "not this year."

But that was a foolish vow, impossible to keep. I couldn't breathe without that delicate spice coming to me whenever the wind was blowing from that quarter. So I went up one late May afternoon and stayed till my hair and shoulders were whitened with a frost of fallen petals. Thousands of bees in the tremulous arches of pink-tinged bloom were like a nearer tide that drowned out the sea on far ledges. There was something fierce and timeless about that pulse of hidden life that turned me dazed and dizzy as I went from tree to tree. My ears rang with listening, and my arms felt heavy as if the weight of all that spendthrift flowering were laid upon me, too. I had always known and taken it for granted that for every apple that ripens hundreds of prodigal blooms must fall away and be scattered to the four winds. But that day it came over me in a sort of

panic, because I knew it could happen to people the same as to apple trees in May.

"Oh, God," I whispered, with my two hands pressed to my face to shut away the sight, "Why do you have to do it this way?"

But I was ashamed even as I said the words. I was country born and bred and I knew better than to hold Him or anyone else responsible. I knew it had to be like that to keep a world going. It seemed as if the very bees knew it, and their hum was a sort of song with no beginning and no end.

"Not for every bud," they drummed tirelessly in the sunshine, "not for every bud to bear."

Word had come that Nat and Dora would be married in June in New York instead of in Little Prospect as there had been some talk that they might be. They were hastening plans because Mr. Drake was sending them abroad for several months.

"Queer the way things turn out," Henry Willis said after he had shared Rissa's last letter with me. "I always counted on Rissa marrying first. It looked once as if she and Will Drake might make a match of it, and here it's Nat and Dora after all. Well, it's a relief to me, and I must say Mr. Drake is being very generous."

"He can afford to be," I reminded him. "Nat's proved he's on the way to big things. Only," I couldn't help speaking out what was in my mind, "only those Drakes are the kind that won't ever let him forget where the money comes from."

Henry Willis sighed and reached again for Rissa's letter with his crippled hands.

"Well," he said, "I hope Rissa'll see fit to come back here once the wedding's over. She ought to with things the way they are."

He was more hard put to keep the place going than he had ever been. Land had risen by leaps and bounds in those last few years and with Jake's new enterprise, it was bound to go higher still, with taxes keeping pace accordingly. Better roads and a town sidewalk; the new water supply, and a wharf large

enough to let the summer steamer land its passengers and freight,—all these improvements came heavily on the taxpayers. Henry Willis was at his wits' end to meet the Fortune share, let alone having anything left over. A shore acre or two, lopped off on either side of The Folly, would have brought good prices as building sites. Neither he nor Rissa would have hesitated to let them go if they could have got round the terms of the Major's will. But it would be eight years more before she was free to sell and Fortune's Folly was hardly the sort of place summer people rented. In spite of its commanding view and size, it wouldn't have made much showing, with its great shabby rooms and old fashioned furnishings. People hadn't lost their heads over old places and old things then as they did later on. They wanted porches and plumbing. The cavernous tin tub that had been a wonder to the neighborhood when the Major first had it put in, would have made them laugh. Even their servants would have grumbled at using it.

Everything came with a rush that June of 1891, trying to make up for a late Spring by an added fury of green. On the morning of Nat's wedding day I was up and out before the east had shifted from fiery rose to early blue. I couldn't stay indoors knowing what day it was. I had to go out even before the dew had dried. The kitchen fire only needed replenishing and when that was done I struck off with a big splint basket on my arm. Even through my heavy mud-caked shoes I could feel the coldness of wet grass; the hem of my skirt hung damp about my ankles. Everything looked more brave and shining before the sun was high enough to steal away the bloom of dew. I couldn't help feeling dingly as a last year's cone in all that brightness.

"I'll go down to the old strawberry patch," I said, "maybe there'll be enough for breakfast."

Years before there had been fine strawberry plants set out in a sunny, sheltered place between the barn and the orchard. Once they had been Bo's pride, though it had been a good while since anyone had cared for them. They were all mixed in with grass and daisies and buttercups but they still bore fruit. The

more they had dwindled in size the sweeter they had grown, for the flavor grew as they shrank. I stooped to push aside the leaves and saw them, thick as stars underfoot. Nothing mattered for the next hour but to gather one pointed, crimson drop after another. I gave myself to each as I laid it in my basket. The sun dried the grass and climbed till it was hot along my back and on my bare head. But I didn't mind that. I picked on and on, with the sweat gathering on my forehead and my eyes seeing only the glint of red under leaf and grass blade. The big basket was nearly full when I heard mother ringing the bell to call me for breakfast.

"My," she said when I showed them to her, "I didn't know they'd even started to get ripe. We'd ought to preserve 'em I s'pose, but it takes an awful lot of sugar."

Her words sounded dim in my ears I was so tired from stooping in the sun. My hands shook, that had been so steady, as I lifted my coffee cup.

"I've got other plans for them, mother," I heard myself saying, "you wait and see."

By noon I had plenty more, and there would be twice as many in another couple of days. I carried them to the woodshed and hunted out all the old berry boxes we had saved. There were rhubarb plants by the back steps and I lined each with a leaf before I shook in the strawberries. Mother came to the door and watched me curiously.

"What do you think you're going to do with so many?" she asked. "Sell them?" I nodded without looking up. "If you think Will Stanley'll take these off your hands I can tell you right now he won't. He's out for the big ones they raise over to Plunket's farm."

"I'm not going to sell them to Will. These are different from any you can buy and—" I filled the last box and set it with the others on the bench before I wound up, "I've decided to peddle these round myself."

"Kate you never will in this world! You know how you've been with strangers from a child."

"Well, I'm not a child anymore. I know these are good and I guess I won't mind talking about berries."

"You mean you'll go round to back doors and all?"

"Yes, I'll take the old punt and start this afternoon. Jake has a boy to peddle his fish now so I needn't be afraid of our running into each other. There's quite a few summer places open already and more coming next week. Strawberries will last till Fourth of July and after that I can get raspberries and blueberries. I don't need to stir off the place for any, and with the punt to row it's clear gain, same's it was for Jake."

She saw my mind was made up so she didn't try to stop me. I think she thought one day of it would be enough.

"Oh, Kate," she said as I set off for the boathouse. "I didn't ever think 'twould be this way when—when we came here to The Folly. What's it all been for, your learning nice ways and how to speak better'n I do, if you haven't anything to show for it but peddling berries from door to door, same's if you hailed from the poor-farm?"

Her voice broke and she was ready to cry.

"I don't see where it's any different from your cooking things for the store before they got their own bakery," I reminded her. "I guess it's my turn now and it would be a shame to let all these berries go to waste."

But I wasn't nearly as brave as I sounded. My knees were shaking under my skirt after I tied the punt to the landing over on Spindle Point and started out with my baskets of berries on an old box cover. I knew the cottages over there were opening early, I'd seen lights lately. Perhaps it was because everything reminded me of Nat that day, that everyone I met and spoke to seemed to matter. I can see the different faces of those people yet, as plain as can be. I can see myself in my green calico dress with the little orange half-moons printed over it, going up the path, carrying my load and saying over under my breath:—

"I've got some strawberries to sell if you happen to need any. They're not so big as the ones at the store, but they're the next best to wild ones and I picked them fresh this morning. They're

fifteen cents and I'd be obliged if you could let me have the basket back."

I remember the first woman who turned me away. She must have been the lady of the house, though she had an apron over her dress and she was helping a maid to hang out blankets and rugs in the sun. I wouldn't have minded her not buying my berries, but it hurt me that she hadn't even looked at them. It seemed not quite fair somehow, and I never wanted to turn back as I did after I got away from the door. But I made myself go on to the next one. The big colored cook there wasn't so short with me. She sniffed and poked at one of my baskets.

"Yes, they is kind of small," she grinned, "but they's sweet down to the bottom. You ain't put yo' best on top."

She bought a couple and emptied them in a big yellow bowl. "I'll be by with some more the end of the week," I told her. "They make nice preserves, too, at least we've always had good luck with ours."

The woman at the next house was foreign looking and I couldn't make her understand at first. Then another maid came and said things to her in a language I had never heard. They were both big and fair, with round, very pleasant faces. I motioned to them to try a berry and that was a good idea. A third maid joined them and could talk in a broken sort of way.

"Take t'ree baskets," she said, "goot strawberries for taste, make small."

She went off to get the money and I shook the three baskets out on a platter while I waited. There was a batch of freshly baked cakes cooling on the table and the woman who was cook gave me one. They were still hot and covered with caraway seed which I never liked, but I ate it down and smiled as if I liked it. That friendly gesture made me feel better. It melted me the way a child did farther on at a house where they headed me off before I could get to the back door.

"No, we don't want anything today." A woman called from the porch. "Goodness," I heard her say to someone inside, though she meant it for me to hear, "you can't get away from

people wanting to sell you things even way off here! Come in now, Elsie."

The little girl she called to was sitting in a swing nearby and she looked up and smiled at me. She was too little, I guess, to notice how red my face had turned under her mother's words, but her smile was grave and somehow encouraging. I wanted to go over and give her a swing and see her curls and her pink skirts blow out as she went up. But I didn't dare do more than smile back because they were watching from the house.

"I'm sorry, we got ours at the store," they said at several other places, "but if you're coming by again we'll get them of you. Native ones are always better."

And then there was the girl I found all alone in the last house. I could hardly see her for the smoke that was pouring out of the kitchen stove. The room was blue with it and her eyes were red and smarting as she stood there with her face all smudged and a poker in her hand.

"Oh, dear," she said when she saw me at the door, "I thought you were Captain Grant. Maybe you saw him down on the float."

"No," I said, "there wasn't anyone there, but I guess you forgot to open the damper, or maybe the wood's too green. Let me have a try."

"Oh, would you? It looked so easy and I thought I'd surprise them with supper when they all got back, but first it went out, and now it won't go out. I never was all alone with a wood stove before."

I set down my baskets and took the poker out of her hand. It was just as I thought. She had the stove stuffed full of green wood and paper and the drafts closed tight. I hauled out most of the sticks and fixed some kindling from the woodbox and it began to go better. When the smoke had cleared a little, she wiped her eyes on the corner of a funny white ruffled apron and laughed apologetically.

"Oh," she said again, in that quick way she had, "I don't know who you are, but thank you ever so much."

"Stoves take humoring sometimes," I said, "you have to get used to their ways."

She was so pretty with her fair hair all falling down round her hot face that I almost forgot why I was there in that strange kitchen.

"You came for something," she was going on, "I forgot to ask you. Oh, strawberries—"

We had both moved back to the table and I began to explain that they were small and the reason why. It was easy to tell her about them, almost too easy because she looked as if she had never bought a box of berries in her life.

"I'll take them," she broke in before I had told her the price. "It's nice to have something you don't have to cook. The maids don't get here till tomorrow on the boat."

"How many could you use?" I asked her. I had sold seven and there were five left.

"Well, if you can spare all those," she helped herself to a berry and I saw that her mouth was almost as smooth and red as the one she bit into, "we can have them for supper and breakfast and lunch, too. Wait till I get the money."

"You don't need to buy all these just because I helped you with the stove," I told her. "Maybe your folks won't want such a lot."

"Oh, yes, they will," she was off, whistling as she went.

She followed me out when I took my empty baskets. She looked even prettier there in the sun, and so helpless and young. I knew she was the kind who would never know how to get fires to burn or a meal on the table, but there would always be people to come to her rescue as I had. Somehow I didn't mind that in her. It was right, the way it was right for those lilies of the field in the Bible, not to toil or reap.

"My," she said as I turned into the path, "it's a lovely day, too bad it's almost over."

"Yes," I thought bitterly as I hurried down to the landing, "it's almost over. Nat's married to Dora by now and I've made a dollar and eighty cents!"

CHAPTER XXVI

RISSA came back in early July, looking worn and lovely and only half aware of what was going on about her. Friends had driven her over from the train and she met me as I came up from picking the last of the strawberries. Mother must have been talking to her about me. I could tell by her glance that took in my old clothes and my stained hands and hot face.

"Don't come too near me I'm all over dirt," I warned her. "I meant to clean up before you got here. I know I look like a scarecrow in these old things, but there's mostly no one to see but the crows and George."

We sat down on a bench under one of the apple trees with the basket between us. She helped herself to a berry turning it absently about between her fingers.

"I expect mother told you I'd gone into selling them," I said at last, "they're about over now, but there'll be raspberries soon. It's a funny thing for me to be doing, but I don't mind now I'm used to it. I suppose you saw all the new houses that have gone up since last time you were back."

"Kate," she spoke suddenly, though we didn't let ourselves look up, "what on earth was the trouble between you and Jake Bullard and why didn't you tell us when you were in New York?"

"I don't know why I couldn't, Rissa," I pushed the damp hair from my forehead and looked off to the far blue between the apple boughs, "but somehow I just couldn't seem to with Nat's music mattering so much more, and then after I knew about Dora Drake."

"Yes, he said he'd told you." Her voice went cold and I knew

she would never forgive me for knowing that first. "Well, anyway we couldn't believe it when we heard you weren't going to be married. Nat was all upset about it. He said he was going to write you a letter, but I guess he didn't, there were so many other things on his mind."

I was surprised that I could answer her quietly the way I did.

"He didn't have to write," I said, "there wasn't any reason for me to bother either of you then."

"Your mother acted as if that quarrel you and Jake had was about us, and your coming on for Nat's Symphony, was it?"

"That was part of it, but not nearly all. I guess we waited too long. You can grow a good ways from anybody in seven years. Everyone thinks I was a fool to let my chances of marrying go. Maybe I was, I don't know. Anyhow I'm glad you're back for awhile, The Folly's seemed pretty empty."

"Empty?" She echoed my last word, "How do you suppose it seems to me now? Everything reminds me of Nat, and—and he doesn't need me anymore."

I could feel how it hurt her to say that. The old wall was between us, but I knew that in spite of her pride she was crying to me from behind it.

"It's hard on you, Rissa," I began lamely, "I knew it would be."

"Oh," she tossed the berry away with shaking hands and turned to me, so that our eyes met at last, "it isn't that I'd mind being hurt. Nat could walk over me rough shod if he wanted to, only it's all been for nothing, his working so hard and all that money we spent. He's just on the edge of big things and she comes along and knocks everything in a heap."

"But they must love each other. Nat's no fool, Rissa."

"He is about her. She could fool any man, but she doesn't fool me. I know all she wants is to have him all hers. She's always got everything she wanted so far and she wanted to have a famous composer for a husband, so she's got him. I know how it is and I know how it's going to be."

Her eyes, usually so clear and gray, were dim with misery.

Her face looked sharp and the color of one of the Chinese ivories.

"You don't understand what it's like, Kate, to bank everything you have on one person and then to lose."

I thought that maybe I did, though in so different a way from hers.

"But, Rissa," I said, "things have to change. You shouldn't talk as if you didn't have anything left. You're so young and lovely and everyone's fond of you, especially Dick Halter."

She sighed at that.

"I know," her voice sounded low and tired, "I ought to be able to care for him. Sometimes I can almost make myself believe I do, but not quite. I wish I could go away right now and see new places and new people."

"I don't believe just going places makes much difference. I know I've never been much of anywhere, but I can't help thinking we're like snails having to carry ourselves around with us wherever we go."

"Well," Rissa gave the little shrug that always meant she had said more than she meant to, "it looks as if I'd carry this place around with me for a good while yet. I'm tied to it hand and foot, and just when it's the time to sell."

We had risen and were walking back towards the house. I stopped short at her words.

"You don't mean you'd sell The Folly?"

"Wouldn't I though? But I can't even give it away. Don't look at me like that, Kate, I haven't said I was going to. You and your mother can stay on as long as it holds together, and I suppose it will. Great Grandfather Fortune built it to last."

That was the closest we came to one another all the rest of that summer. She wasn't there for long spells as it turned out. People were always asking her to come and visit them or taking her on trips by land and sea, and she snatched at any chance to go. The only times she seemed like her old self would be when she was packing her trunk and making plans. After July letters

came from Nat, but she never shared them with me, and I didn't like to press her for news of him.

"He says he's well and happy. They're in Norway now." That was about as much as I could get out of her. "Oh, yes, and he said to be sure and tell you the wild cranberries are just the same as ours."

It was a warm, dry summer without rain or fog. Henry Willis improved under it, though he was so tied up with rheumatic knots that he seldom got out of his room. The young doctor who had taken old Doctor Robbins' place wasn't encouraging when he talked with mother and me.

"We can't do much for cases like his," he said, "except keep him comfortable. He's got a remarkable constitution for a man of his age. They seem to come like that round here if they didn't go down with some vessel in their young days."

But I could tell he was failing because he worried less over the state of Fortune affairs. He seemed to let go after Rissa returned. There had always been a bond between those two, yet there was nothing demanding in his love as there had been in her father's. He asked no more than to have her about, stirring up the past for him as she moved through the rooms. All his energy had been poured into the Fortune family and now he had no more to give, though sometimes he could gather enough to go over papers and bills with her and discuss the problem of debits and credits. She shunned these sessions as much as possible, making his health an excuse to avoid them, because they were so distasteful to her. Perhaps they talked of the place more than I knew, for I was indoors as little as I could be after the full tide of summer set in.

I gave myself to it complete, grudging every moment I must spend at stove or sink or even in sleep. George cautioned me against driving myself so, and mother bewailed the change that had come over me, but their words went in one ear and out of the other. I only wanted to squeeze an extra hour or two out of the days. The briefness of northern summers was an old story to me and morning after morning I was out in time to see

the sun pushing up in a red ball behind the easterly islands. It was then I would go after berries,—raspberries along the shore or the later blueberries that had sprung up among the stumps across the inlet. I liked to pick them while they were still cool, before they lost their bloom in the noon sun. Sometimes I rowed far up the creek to find new patches, ripe for my pail. I came to crave those times when I had the still, night freshened world to myself with only an early gull or an indignant crow to scold me.

"Kate can smell out a berry patch like nobody else," George used to say when I came back with my spoils. "She'd find 'em somehow if she was wrecked on a coral reef."

It was true. I had always had almost second sight when it came to tracking wild things down. I used to tie the punt along shore and strike in through brush and scrub, till I came on what I was after, great clusters of crimson or blue, to be had for the taking. Maybe some people think things out when they pick, but I never could. I could only go from berry to berry, with my mind as well as my hands. Before one was in the pail I was after another, and while I picked I could be happy in some secret way that was past all explaining.

Coming home again, on foot along the tide water fields or pastures, or by water in the punt, I would see the chimneys of The Folly and the summer cottages smoking with breakfast fires and white triangles of sail going up in the sun. Children and dogs would be splashing in the pebbled coves, and in haying time men with scythes beginning their cutting. It was good to be breathing that air, strong with salt and warm with sun; good to be somehow part of the pattern of time and place.

"The heavens are the heavens of the Lord; but the earth hath he given to the children of men."

That was how it used to seem to me those early mornings.

There never was such a season for apples as that one. All the old trees in the Folly orchard bent under the weight of their yellow and red and russet. It was as if I had turned to them in my early despair and this was their answer to me now. Somehow when I gathered the first ones, the little Snows and the

tart Greenings to sell at the summer cottages, I couldn't help feeling that something of me was in every one. They made me ashamed, too, those old trees did, the way they bore their fruit year after year and asked nothing in return, not even that it should be gathered. They made me know that love wasn't a thing that could be kept unshared, any more than an apple tree could bear only for such and such a one. For then the tree would perish of its own load, even as the heart. I remember thinking of that under the speckled Russet tree that was so windy and doubled over, and feeling almost as if it had spoken to me out of its rooted wisdom and enduring fruitfulness.

It seems right to me now that Dick Halter should have chosen that month of September to come and stay at The Folly and that he should have painted me there in the orchard. It was like old times to have him back, and the old boathouse full of his paints and canvases. He insisted upon paying mother for his board and she couldn't refuse when he told her he'd have to go and stay at the Inn if she didn't. Summer people would have bothered him down in Little Prospect. They were curious enough after word got about that he was with us. I have no notion how much he pressed Rissa to marry him during his stay, but it was plain that he wanted her as much as ever and she did turn to him in her loneliness. As for me, I could talk to Dick Halter as I could to no other.

He painted me in the strong September sunshine as I picked. He was willing to follow me about from tree to tree with his paints and easel. I couldn't spare the time to stand still the way he was used to having people do, but he managed it by snatches, an hour here and an hour there, working now at my hands, now at the stretch of my arms as I reached to upper branches, and now at my face when I could stop to rest. He knew from the start just how it would look on the canvas, and I think he knew, too, that it was going to be one of his best pieces of work.

"I don't know what you want to paint me for," I protested the day he began it. "Mother says this summer's played the mischief with whatever looks I had."

He smiled and went on getting out his paints from the box he carried round with him.

"No," he said, "I don't expect you to know why I want to paint you any more than one of these trees would. Somehow, Kate, you're all of this place. If I can put you here on canvas the way you seem to me now you won't know yourself, and people will go on admiring you long after we're both dead and gone. I really mean that," he squinted at me behind his glasses, "though it may not sound modest."

Rissa came out sometimes to watch him paint, but she could never stay long for the sun made her head ache, and so I had a chance to talk to him of Nat as I couldn't have with her listening. Little scraps of what he said come back to me now, with the very tones of his deep, slow voice.

"Kate," I remember he said without warning one day, "it's a pity you and I don't happen to be in love with each other when we get along so well?"

I wouldn't admit that his words were anything but a joke.

"No, I'm serious," he went on as he worked, "the only trouble is I feel about Rissa the way you do about Nat."

No one except Jake had ever hinted that such a thing could be possible, and I felt my heart begin to go so fast I could only shake my head without summoning a word.

"It's no use your denying it to me," Dick Halter was going on, "I've always known how you felt about Nat, even before you knew it yourself. It's queer the four of us all being here together years ago and never quite getting free of each other again, isn't it?"

"But Nat's free of us now."

"Well, I don't know. It's too soon to tell of course, only I have a feeling he hasn't married the right one. He needs so much more than she's got to give." He painted on a minute or two before he went on. "If I could only get Rissa to come round now, Kate, do you think there's any chance she might?"

"She told me she wished she could. But I guess all the feelings she had got used up on Nat from the time they were little

and the Major was so hard on him. Rissa isn't one to let go easy."

"I know." He set down his palette and brushes. "I'm through painting for today, so I'll give you a hand with those upper branches."

He often stopped to help me, though I was used to managing by myself.

"I met that fellow Bullard you were going to marry," he went on, as we gathered the apples he had shaken down, "yesterday in the village. He's getting to be the whole show there. Yes, he tried to sell me a house,—that old one over on Noyes Point."

"I expect he'd like to get rid of it before the summer's over. That was the one we planned to set up in ourselves."

"I wouldn't have mentioned it if I'd known," he apologized.

"You can for all of me. It's on mother's account I mind most. She'll never get over my not marrying and having a home of my own."

"And children," he gave me back the word I hadn't said, "you're the kind that ought to have them. I'd like to paint you with dozens of your own——"

He broke off and shouldered the heavy basket I had just filled. Neither of us said a word till we were by the woodshed.

"Kate," he said, "I've given up wondering why things are the way they are."

There was another time when we talked together while he painted. It was mid-September and such a still, warm day that the apples on the ground and those on the trees gave out a peculiar spicy steam in the noon sun. It hung over the orchard, heady and delicious. Its flavor on the lips was like some rare, untasted wine. I had been gathering and sorting fruit since early morning, for most of the summer families that had become my regular customers were leaving soon and had ordered baskets and even a barrel or two to take away with them. I had done well with my apple selling, better even than with the berries, but the baskets were heavy to handle alone. George had promised to

help me deliver them that afternoon, so I was busy sorting out the best of the Greenings and Snows; the Northern Spies, Jonathans, and Russets into piles. I loved the feeling of them in my hands, and the way the smooth skins took on a shine when I rubbed them. Every one that went into those baskets and barrels I had handled and polished. Dick Halter said there wasn't an apple in the whole orchard whose shape and color I didn't know by heart.

"Come over here, Kate," he called to me, "you ought to stop long enough to look at my picture. You haven't seen it since it was half done."

I was glad to rest a minute. My head swam from all the stooping and sorting, which was perhaps the reason his painting surprised me the way it did. I have never seen it since, for it was bought the next year. But I can see it now with the paint still wet in the sun. He had caught the very color and warmth of the place in those brush strokes of his that looked so careless and rough. And there was I standing in the midst of it, in my old blue gingham as real as life yet somehow different, for he had touched me from head to foot with the same light that was on leaf and apple. The lines of my body showed strong and clear under my dress folds, and I saw suddenly that I was a woman grown. No one who looked at that picture could ever mistake me for a girl.

"Well," he was asking a little anxiously as I stared and stared, "What do you think of it?"

"It's good," I told him. "It's kind of as if you put a different light on things I'm used to, even on me." He nodded and I could tell he was pleased. "Are you going to give it a name the way you did those in your exhibition last winter?"

"I'm bad at that sort of thing. You do it for me, Kate."

"Well," I said, "it makes me think of a verse in the Bible that says, 'Comfort me with apples.'"

"Yes, that's right!" He nodded his approval.

I went back to my work and after awhile he put up his painting things and came over to help me.

"Kate," he said as we stood there side by side over the big pile of small, bruised apples that would be made into cider, "if that picture of mine is good it's because of the way I feel about you. You've got such a lot to give—"

"Give," I broke in, "what have I got to give that anybody wants?"

He reached out and took both my hands in his, the way Nat always used to.

"I can say what I mean better on canvas," he went on. "Look at your hands now," he moved my fingers in his, "they're easy and open, not clenched tight like some. You're not afraid to let go of things."

It seemed strange that he should be saying, almost in the same words, what Old Lady Phibben had told me when I held the lucky stone all those years ago.

Up to the day he left I hoped that Rissa might come round to him. I think perhaps she might if her Aunt Esther had not written just then to invite her to spend the winter in Philadelphia. Those two hadn't been intimate since the Major's death, but now the cousins were married she wanted someone to keep her company in the big city house. Rissa preferred New York or Europe, but she had no hankering to stay on at The Folly after winter set in.

"I'm just like a cricket," she used to say listening to them that fall, "chirping to keep their courage up and all the time feeling the frost in their bones. Ugh, how I dread to hear them."

Dick Halter was up early the morning he was to leave. I met him coming up from the boathouse where he had been packing his paintings.

"You can have some coffee now ahead of the rest," I told him, "I just made a pot."

We had the kitchen to ourselves for awhile.

"You were lucky," I said as I poured him out a cup, "not to go off in the line storm. It's late this year." The steam rose warm and fragrant from our cups and I felt a pang to think

how long it might be before he sat there again. "I'm going to miss you," I told him.

"And I'm going to miss you, Kate. Some year maybe I'll stay through the winter and paint and do what I want to, not so many portraits of wives and daughters of important men. They're either fat or foolish, sometimes both."

"I guess it's a change for you to do someone in old clothes once in awhile. You must tell me how people like the apple one."

"I won't forget. Listen, Kate, now we've got a minute alone like this, I want you to promise you'll send me word if you need any money. I can't get anything out of the old man upstairs about the place, and you know I'd be the last one Rissa would borrow from if she had to. She's likely to do something foolish if she gets in a tight place."

"I know. The Major was the same way. Look what his land would have brought now if he hadn't sold it to build those last vessels? But I guess we'll all make out someway."

"You wouldn't let me give you anything now, just to keep in case? You see, Kate. I can talk to you like this because you and I aren't Fortunes. We haven't got this queer kind of pride that keeps them from making or taking money."

"I'd rather tell you if I needed any. I promise you I will if anything happens,—ever."

We shook hands on it, solemnly, across the kitchen table.

CHAPTER XXVII

AFTER Rissa had left in late October we shut off the parlors and all the front of the house except Henry Willis' bedroom. We needed to save fuel, for though there was still plenty of wood on the Fortune land, there was only George to cut it and his old horse for hauling. All the summer people buying wood had sent the price up to double and more than it used to be a cord, and coal was even more dear. There were extra charges for delivering loads of anything to The Folly. It was different from the old days when the Major had had his own horses to fetch and carry. Mother and I had to make shift in a good many ways to get through that winter.

"I don't know how you stand it up there to The Folly," Sadie used to say when I stopped in to see her on my trips to the village. "Sometimes I think I have it hard here, when the pump freezes, and Orion's laid up with something, or Louis gets one of his grumpy fits when nothing suits him. Well, at least I'm not buried alive with nobody young to talk to and nothing except trees and water to see out of the windows from one day's end to another, same's you are, Kate. Don't you get awful lonesome?"

"I guess I would if I had time to be," I told her.

The truth was that I didn't let myself feel things any more, and I was thankful for my own numbness. I had let go, first of security, and then of love, and last of all, of my early despair. I guess drowning people must feel the way I did then, when they let go and give themselves up to the water. I had no wish to come to again and cling to some bit of old wreckage. There was no need now to pretend to myself; to tell myself that I

loved Jake; that I did not love Nat; that somehow things would be different tomorrow or the day after. My hands had never been more sure and quick, or my feet more tireless, but I shrank my world to the size of The Folly rooms, the barn, and the nearby shores and orchard. The little woodsmen on the clock I wound twice each week were not more precise in their paces than I, but I dreaded any inner prick that might betray me once more to joy or pain.

We worked so hard to keep Henry Willis comfortable through those months, and then, after all, it was mother who couldn't hold out till spring. She took a chill in March just before my birthday. It happened when George and I were busy tapping some of the sugar maple trees down by the swamp. There were not many of them but once the sap started flowing we were both on the jump emptying buckets and hauling full ones back to be boiled down for syrup. I was sure I could peddle that later on, so I kept it simmering on the old stove in the woodshed. Mother would keep coming out to see how I was getting on and to say when she thought the syrup had thickened enough. It was cold out there after her hot kitchen and she wouldn't put her shawl on half the time.

"I've got kind of a stitch in my side," she said when I asked why she kept putting her hand there a night or two later. "But I'll be all right by tomorrow if I rub on some mustard and take a hot stone to bed."

I remembered the Major's pleurisy and got her between the covers right off with some of the old brandy to drink. But she never left her bed again. Next day when George fetched the doctor up he said it was pneumonia. I think she must have guessed how sick she was, though she never let on for fear of frightening me. Annie spelled me off all she could, and George helped with Henry Willis and keeping the fires up, but to this day I don't know how we ever put through those days and nights.

When the word got round in Little Prospect how sick she was, Martha Jordan came up with soup and things and offers of

help. I guess she'd wanted to come a good while back, only Jake and the girls wouldn't let her. I knew he had driven her over in the new store team, but he never so much as came to the door. I stood there, answering all her questions, and knew that he was outside, right within call. Jake had always been fond of mother and said she was to spend her last years with us. I couldn't help thinking it ought to have been that way, and yet there he was no more to us than one of the stones on the drive.

"When folks are sick you have to let bye-gones be bye-gones," Cousin Martha told me. "She had no call to say some of the things she did, but I never thought but what there'd be time for it to smooth over. We're too old to harbor grudges and she was good to poor Sam when he was ailing. You tell her I came on account of old times."

"I'll tell her, Cousin Martha, I wish you and she hadn't had to have words over what happened to Jake and me."

"Well, I'm sure no one wishes it more'n I do," she gave me a reproving look as she gathered up her things to go. "I'm not one to side with my own if others are in the right, but if they're not, I'm bound to speak what I think."

I knew what she thought of me, but I had no heart to reason with her. I watched from the entry door to see Jake help her up beside him and drive off without a look in my direction. He sat square and solid on the front seat, with his shoulders hunched high to show me how little I mattered to him.

The doctor had said mother wasn't to talk, but along towards the last I couldn't see what harm where was in letting her have her own way. The night she died the wind had got round to the east and the fog came up thick from the Narrows. The spruces dripped with wet and the bell over on Whale Back Light sounded very plain. I was used to hearing it toll, but not to straining for a thread of voice it might easily drown. I couldn't think she was going to die, her mind was so clear and she took such an interest in little things right up to the last. We talked about ever so many that night with the fog just the other side of the window pane,—about how many cups the big coffee pot held,

and whether sweet or sour milk made the best spice cake, and about the jars of preserves down cellar. We talked about making over my blue taffeta, and putting more camphor in the blanket chest.

"I guess you'll make out all right," she said suddenly. "But I blame myself for not seeing how things were heading. I'd ought to have taken Jake in hand 'fore he went land-crazy and you got other notions."

"If you mean Nat, mother, I never fooled myself I had any chance with him when I went off to hear his music. But there are some things you have to go ahead and do, no matter what."

"I know. If only you hadn't gone and set yourself on a Fortune. Working for Fortunes is one thing, loving 'em's another. Seems funny I couldn't have seen then how it was bound to be, it's so plain to me now. Well, live and learn, die and forget it all."

I gave her another dose of medicine hoping she would doze, but her eyes stayed wide and bright in her face that had grown so small and wrinkled, those last days.

"Must be most your birthday, Kate," she remarked after a little.

"Not till day after tomorrow, mother."

"I hope the line storm'll hold off for it. Lord, what a night that was for both of us twenty six years ago. Your father laughed at me for believing it was like some sort of warning that you'd have it hard. He didn't take any stock in signs and portents."

"But you do, mother, don't you?"

"I've seen too many of 'em work, in my time. Rose was a great one for such things. She was real good company, Rose was. Remember how she always used to say—"It's never too late to die or get married?!"

She tried to laugh, but it ended in a spell of coughing. Those were the last words I remember her saying to me.

Afterward I wondered if she had asked about my birthday because she guessed she would be buried on it. I think maybe she did. All her old friends turned to and helped me and every-

one said how good she had been and loyal to the Fortunes. It was only right, they all said, that she should be buried in the family lot along with the Major. But if I'd had my way she would have gone to the old one back of the orchard beside Bo and poor Frisky. I guess a good many thought I must be hard and unfeeling the way I went right on with the chores and doing for Henry Willis through all the queer commotion that follows death in a house.

"She was a fine woman, Kate, a fine woman," he kept saying to me. "I never thought but what she'd be here to see me through, and now I can't even get out of bed to pay my last respects."

"Mother always knew she had your respect," I told him, "and that means a lot more than going to her funeral."

I couldn't make it seem real somehow. I couldn't cry or take on the way I knew they expected me to, not even when we were all there by the open grave. George and I stood together, for Annie had stayed at The Folly with Henry Willis. Once Reverend Chase would have read the words, but now it was a new, young minister who had taken his place. I thought how queer it was as I listened to him reading from the Psalms, that the words went on and on, though the voice of the preacher might change from generation to generation. I heard Cousin Martha and the girls crying behind me and Sadie was sobbing a little way off. That was queer, too, that she should call up grief and I should stay still as stone. I had to notice that the wind was still east and the mist already turning to rain. Yes, the line storm was brewing. I could feel the damp on my face and the Fortune tomb stones were turning dark with rain.

"A meeting in the sunlight is lucky as a burying in the rain," I had heard mother say a hundred times, and now she wasn't here to say it for herself.

"Let us pray——"

They were beginning to lower the wooden box. I bowed my head, too, but I wasn't listening to the words. All I wanted for mother was to be sure that it hadn't been for nothing,—all those

steps her feet had taken; the fires she'd kept up, and the baking and preserving and dishes she'd put through in her time. It seemed as if there must be some way of knowing, and there wasn't. A man's hand reached for a shovel. The earth smelt strong and loamy as it fell.

A good many people in Little Prospect had me on their minds afterwards and came up to sympathize. We sat and talked about mother in company voices and they said how much she would be missed. They didn't have to tell me that, for I missed her the way you miss what is part of the pattern of your days and nights. A dozen times I would find myself turning to speak to her, or catch myself listening for her step on the stairs before I was up in the morning. I had to do without looking for her at the kitchen window; to grow used to coming in to an unlit room after dark. I would hurry back from the village with some bit of news, and then remember as I opened the door with it on my lips, that she wouldn't be there to hear it.

"There's no sense to it, Kate," Henry Willis said to me in those first days, "her going instead of me, and you staying on to look after a bed-ridden old man."

He turned his face away and I saw he was beginning to cry, the scanty tears of an old, worn out man.

"No," I said almost sharply for the sight upset me more than I dared to let him see, "there isn't any sense in who goes and who stays. Even way back in Bible times there wasn't any and I guess it'll be the same when we're all done for. But don't you worry about me. Maybe Rissa'll get back this summer to keep you company when I have to be out working round the place."

She had made no mention of coming in the note she had written me about mother, in fact, she had said little of herself and only that Nat and Dora were returning shortly to be with the Drakes in New York. I had him on my mind more than ever then for I had moved into his old room to be within call of Henry Willis. Once I would have minded being there. His things would have disturbed me, but now I could sleep better

for having them near at hand. I would never be free of Nat, and I did not want to be.

Sadie brought Orion up and spent two days and a night with me. Louis was off on a fishing trip and she got leave from the post office. She helped me with some spring sewing and Orion made free of the place. He was never tired of watching the woodsmen come out of the clock and of looking at the pictures in Nat's old books. He was a quiet, friendly little thing and he liked to sit by Henry Willis' bed and ask questions.

"That old man forgets my name lots of times," he told us once, "he thinks it's Nat."

"Well, you let him call you what he wants to," his mother answered with a quick look at me. "He don't mean any harm by it."

I knew why Henry Willis went back to other times and other names when he heard small, hurrying feet about the rooms. Children can step into outgrown shoes and never guess they are wearing any but their own.

"He's awfully good, Sadie," I said watching Orion run off, "and smart for five years old."

"Yes, he is, if I do say it. I wouldn't mind having more now, but it don't look's if I was going to. Sometimes I think it's because I didn't want him that it's turned out this way. It's kind of as if you didn't get things in this world when you want them. Either they come too soon 'fore you're ready, or else it's too late. I swear I think there's a hitch to most things we get."

We were sewing by the kitchen window and I remember just the pattern of the goods she was hemming, along with her words. They always come back to me together and I've thought of her words time and again.

"I guess you've heard about Jake's making that big new sale," she went on after awhile, "He's sold the old Noyes' place and another shore piece over east of that. They say he got a thousand dollars an acre and he didn't pay five hundred for the lot when he bought. They figure he must have cleared around

thirty or forty thousand dollars with Little Heron taken last fall."

"Well, he works for his money. I've got to give him credit."

"All right, he's working for something else, too,—there's a school teacher over to Thomaston and they say he sees her every week. Hilda spread it all over town he means to marry her."

"I'm not surprised." But I couldn't help a twinge. A woman has to feel that, even if she was the one to break off, and I had been bound to Jake so many years.

"If she does marry him, I hope he'll lead her a life," Sadie snapped off her thread with spirit. "Jake Bullard loved you, Kate. That quarrel you two had wouldn't have got under his skin the way it did if he hadn't. He'll never rest till he pays you back, and Kate, I shouldn't tell you this, but I'm going to,—he's been writing to Rissa Fortune."

"Sadie, what makes you think so?"

"Because he shoved a whole pile of letters in the window for me to stamp last week. He was in a hurry and I did it for him. That's how I saw one addressed to her in Philadelphia. I kind of think he's set on getting hold of The Folly."

"But he can't. Rissa's hands are tied till she's thirty-five."

"Jake could get around anything if he made up his mind to. Well, I just thought I'd tell you, though I haven't any business noticing who writes letters and where they go to."

I forgot all about her words in the first rush of things to be done about the place that April. It was a sudden spring with hardly a day, it seemed, between brown mud and that first fierce green. But it didn't bother me the way the last had. My heart stayed steady through it all, even when the orchard was like a rosy foam spread out on the slope when I would look from the upper windows. I raked away the banked leaves in the flower border and uncovered the stone Buddha in his old place. I helped George with the potato patch and vegetable garden, but we let the crows have the cornfield.

"It's not worth our while to work that," I told him. "I can

make more out of berries and fruit, only I'll need new baskets and some paint for the punt. I guess we can do that between us."

"Too bad we can't get paint enough for The Folly," George said. "The Major'd feel disgraced to see how it's peeling."

"I know, it does look pretty down at the heel near to. How many gallons of paint do you think it would take, just to give it one coat?"

"I don't know, but plenty, and it needs two to do any good. That's the trouble with white houses, you have to keep 'em up good. Well, it's something the roof holds up. I helped shingle it the last time twelve years ago. It took eleven thousand shingles to cover it."

But Rissa was in no mood to discuss The Folly when she came in late May. I guessed from the first that she had some special reason for appearing so early and that made me remember Sadie's remarks about Jake and the letter.

"I'm glad you're back," I told her that evening as I helped her unpack, "it's been a long pull, and I don't believe Henry Willis could have put through the taxes and things alone this month. I guess you can see he's going down hill. Mother's death upset him more than I thought it did at the time."

"Yes, he's failed a good deal," she told me from the bureau where she was spreading out her brushes and combs and glass bottles. "I thought I'd better see to things myself before I go."

"Then you're not planning to stay the summer, Rissa?"

"I'm going abroad in June," she said without looking up, "some people I know want me to join them." I couldn't think of anything to say for a minute and she went on, "It's too good a chance to miss and it's been dreadfully dull there with Aunt Esther all winter. Then if the Drakes open their place over on Porcupine that means Nat and Dora will be here. I'd miss him worse than ever if I knew he was just across that little stretch of water."

"Nat's coming—soon?"

"Well, late July or August, I don't know exactly. He and Dora have to trail round with her people. I thought I could get

things settled here in a couple of weeks and of course I wanted to see Cousin Henry before I left."

"I suppose you noticed they've raised the taxes again? It's because of widening the roads and clearing those fish houses down by the landing to make some kind of park. There was a regular set-to at last Town Meeting, but Jake Bullard carried the vote. He claims it'll be worth the money spent later, though lots don't think so."

"Yes, I heard," Rissa spoke absently and I thought she seemed anxious to change the subject. "There ought not to be any taxes, —at least not for people like us that have always lived in a place. Look here, Kate, what do you think of this dress Aunt Esther gave me? It goes with this brown cloth cape."

"They're ever so stylish," I admired without letting myself be distracted. "But, Rissa, just how are things fixed? I've done the best I could, but we did have to run quite a bill at the store for supplies this winter, and there was that extra coal for the stove in Henry Willis' room. I'm afraid by the time you get it all paid, and the taxes, there won't be much left for your trip."

"Oh, I'll manage, Kate, don't fuss about it. Of course it's maddening to have the place eat so much up year after year. But you leave it to me."

She acted so mysterious, I felt troubled, though I couldn't put my finger on anything she'd said. Her being there to stay with Henry Willis gave me a chance to work more away from the house and I took advantage of that to be out in the barn and around the place in garden and orchard. I had the maple syrup to get into all the old glass jars and bottles I could find and there were seasoned butternuts to crack and the best of the winter apples to sort over. I meant to work off every kind of thing I could sell that summer and once the berries began to ripen there would be precious little time for fixing baskets and boxes. I had enriched the strawberry patch the fall before and those old plants had rewarded me with more blossoms than ever.

We had had such a spell of sunny weather that I dragged out the winter blankets and beat carpets and did such a big wash

that I had to rig up an extra clothes line. I was out taking the last of it in when I heard wheels on the drive. That had got to be such an uncommon sound lately that I felt some curiosity and went round to the front to see. A horse was tied to the hitching post and the smart, light wagon harnessed to it was brand-new and shiny, the kind the summer people liked to drive. I thought it must belong to some early arrival who knew Rissa and I was just turning back to the washing when I heard Jake Bullard's voice coming from the open window of the Major's old study. It didn't take me a minute to edge over as near as I could get. The lilac bush beside it was in bloom and hid me. I could hear every word, though I couldn't see the speakers.

"It was good of you to come up here," Rissa was saying. "I find it hard to get to the village nowadays and I'm not planning to stay very long."

"No trouble," Jake spoke in a smooth way that was new to me, "always glad to oblige a lady. Now to get down to business,—here's the note all drawn up and ready for you to sign. I've had them look up the title just to make sure it's clear."

"You see, I'm not really supposed to have any say about the place as long as Henry Willis lives, but he's too ill now to be bothered. After all, it does belong to me." I knew from her tone that her chin must be thrust out defiantly.

"You're within your rights. I've looked into that, too. You want ten thousand dollars and you haven't got it. I have and I'll take this house and land for security. Of course you understand about the interest, same's I wrote you?"

"Yes, I'm to pay that twice a year,—it seems a good deal, but then I don't know about such things."

"I'm only charging the regular rate, you can ask anyone over at the bank. I brought the check along with me, but if you want to think it over."

"I didn't mean anything like that," an anxious note had crept into her voice that made me know she was afraid he might change his mind. "I came back especially to see this through, only I just thought if you could make it two or three thousand

more,—after all it's the most important place anywhere along the coast, and land has been going up so."

"Still, we're a long ways from being Bar Harbor," Jake gave his short laugh, "and this house isn't what you'd call very up-to-date. None of the summer folks would give it a second look."

I pressed so close to the window that a branch of lilac caught in my hair and showered me with sweet, small flowers as I straightened up. My feet were taking me right in to the study and those two. I must have been a sight to see with my hair full of petals and my sleeves rolled up and an apron that spilled clothespins from the pockets. But I didn't care about anything except to stop Rissa from signing that paper.

"Rissa," I heard myself saying all in one breath, "you can't do that to The Folly."

"I certainly can," she wheeled about sharply, just as she was sitting down at the Major's desk. "What do you mean by interfering like this?"

"I had to, and you've got to listen to me before you do anything you'll be sorry for. Oh, Rissa, please don't be angry with me. I do know what I'm talking about."

"I didn't know she was in on this," Jake had turned red as a beet and I saw his jaw stiffen. "And I don't see where she comes in."

"She doesn't." Rissa spoke with an edge to her voice that cut like ice. "I haven't asked your advice, Kate, and I'm not planning to take any you give me."

"But you've got to listen to me," she had turned back to the desk and I saw her hand reaching out for the pen, "you've got to. I never tried to interfere with you before, at least, only that one time—and this is worse. He means to get it away from you. I know he does."

"I guess you know why she's carrying on this way." Jake and she acted as if I wasn't in the room at all and that maddened me. "Just because she lost her chances with me is no reason for her making a fool of you, too."

"You leave us and our feelings out of this, Jake Bullard," I said. "I know what you're up to if she doesn't. You can say anything you've a mind to about me, that is, if you can think up anything new to spread around. Please, Rissa, don't let him get his hands on The Folly. If you need money you can get it from someone else, someone who won't do you out of it."

"Really, Kate, you must be out of your senses! I know you and he had some sort of quarrel, but that's no concern of mine, and this isn't yours either."

"Rissa," I went over to the desk and leaned on it I was shaking so, "I've got to tell you how things are whether you like it or not. Way back years ago when the 'Rainbow' burned up Jake knew who set it afire."

"The 'Rainbow'? What's that got to do with this?"

"Nothing except he wouldn't let me tell the Major it was Cousin Sam Jordan did it. I knew, and he knew and he made me keep still."

"Well, but I don't see—" her fingers still gripped the silver pen and she wouldn't look up.

"Maybe it wouldn't have made any difference," I felt desperate the way I had long ago when I first felt the stone wall she could raise between us. "Maybe the Major couldn't have got anything if we had told, but don't you see you can't trust Jake not to trick you again?"

"You can't prove a thing," Jake spoke from his place without moving. "It's just her word against mine, and I guess you know which of us to believe."

"Rissa, anyway, don't do it tonight. Talk to Henry Willis or someone else, just take a little time. You'll thank me someday."

"I'll thank you to keep out of this right here and now, Kate Fernald!"

She flounced about in the chair and dipped the pen. Her fingers gripped the handle tighter than her lips were shut on those last words. I knew it wasn't any use to stay, but I couldn't move, so I watched her set "Clarissa Fortune" there at the bottom of the closely written sheets.

"Here," she blotted and handed them back to Jake. "Thank you for coming over. I'm sorry about all this fuss. I'm sure I don't know now what it's all been about."

I watched her follow him out to the hall and in a minute the hoofs and wheels sounded on the gravel outside. A clothespin rattled out of my pocket and I knew I was shaking all over.

"Kate," Rissa spoke to me from the door as she turned back to go upstairs, "I don't know what's come over you to make such a scene. You've gone just a little too far."

"I wish I could go a lot farther," I heard myself saying, "and if it wasn't for Henry Willis and the place needing me I'd clear out tomorrow. But it isn't because of you I'm staying, and you just remember I meant every word I said."

PART V

CHAPTER XXVIII

WAS 1894 when they built the Mountain Springs House on peak of Jubilee. I could see the road they were cutting to up the mountain side. It ran like a white scar through the far en. I didn't want to see it. I tried not to look, but I would've to see how much it had grown since the week before. Jake llard had made it there. He was behind it, though his hands ln't swung an axe or set the fuse for those blasts of dynamite t made the china rattle on The Folly shelves. I was almost d Henry Willis hadn't lived to hear that hand-made thunder. had died the fall before and everyone had said what a mercy was he hadn't kept me chained to the house through another iter. Sadie and all of Little Prospect expected me to go away l get work, but instead I moved in with George and Annie ton to the farmhouse by the salt creek. They were glad of help I could give them and I of their company, but I never htly belonged there as I did up at The Folly.

'Come down and stay with us, Kate," Sadie had urged me. 'll do you good to see more folks and you can take it easy a spell till you decide what you want to do. I kind of think I'd ought to get away and make something of yourself. u're only going on twenty-eight and you've still got chances. on't mean second chances are the same, but they're something. d, Kate, if you fixed yourself up and didn't work so hard out all weathers you wouldn't look old ahead of your time."

I hadn't given my looks a thought in months and when I nt in her bedroom to put on my coat and hat I stared hard myself in her big mirror. I had had a good season with the it and berries that year in spite of taking care of Henry Wil-

lis. But it had meant working early and late in sun and rain. I would throw on the first dress that came to hand, and pin my hair up any old way, and not wait till the water was dried on my face before I'd be outdoors or else over the stove or wash-tub. I saw then that my cheeks had lost their roundness. My face was square and blunt under the sunburn and freckles that were too deep to wear off. Sun and wind had made my hair rough and rusty as sorrel grass. There were little lines at the corners of my eyes from narrowing them against the sun.

"Well," I thought as I turned away from the glass, "you never had much to part with in the way of looks, that's one comfort."

Orion went with me to the cross roads. He was in good spirits and capered ahead, brandishing a stick he'd found and shouting. The winter sun was at our backs and our two shadows ran, long and wavering, before us as we went.

"Look," he laughed and pointed to them, "we've got humps on our backs!"

It was the way the ruts broke our shadows.

"Wait," I told him, "we'll come to a smooth place soon, then we'll straighten out."

I couldn't but feel better for seeing my shadow laid out straight again. At any rate I wasn't stooped with bending over a counter all day like some who stayed indoors. No, I thought after I sent Orion back and went on alone, I didn't belong cooped up in some store or kitchen anymore than one of those stiff-backed spruces by the road I walked. In the end our bodies went back to earth and sun and air, so where was the difference if we gave ourselves to them a little sooner?

"I'd rather wear out than rust out," George used to say, "and you're bound to do one or the other."

The Folly looked lonely and bleak like some bleached skeleton of a ship high on its point as I reached the bridge and looked up through the trees. It didn't seem right that it should stay dark that winter. I guessed it was the first time those windows had been unlighted in more than a hundred years. I

missed the smoke from its chimneys. I missed all of us out of it,—mother and Henry Willis and Bo and Frisky and Rissa and Nat. The queerest part of it all was that I should be the only one to stay on.

And then I remembered the summer before and that late August afternoon when music had come out to meet me through the ranks of trees. Rissa had been gone for weeks and we had parted stiffly after those words we had had together. I had done without Nat so long, and suddenly the woods and the house and I, along with them, had awakened to his touch, like that wood and castle in the old fairy tale. I remembered how I stood, pressed against one of the trees so that the tang of pitch in my nostrils was all part of those chords of music and my own heart's clamor. I had hardly dared to go in when the last note ended. I had been afraid he might not be alone. But he was. He didn't know I was there till I was right beside the piano. Then he had looked up and smiled in the same way, only a graver, longer smile.

"Kate," he said, taking both my hands and looking up at me from the bench, "it's good to see you here."

"When did you come?" I hadn't been able to say anything but that.

"This afternoon. We drove over from Rockland and I made them let me off by the gates. I've been up to see Uncle Henry. You'd better get the piano tuner right over, half of these notes stick."

"I should think they would," I told him, "you haven't touched them in three years!"

I know that we talked after that in snatches, but I can't remember much of what we said. Only he pulled me down to the bench beside him and we sat there while the room grew dim and only his face, all pointed dark and white stayed clear to me out of it. I couldn't let go of his face, though his words went past me sometimes, I held it so fast. I heard him laugh and I heard myself join in, but I knew how it was with him, the same as if he'd told me he was unhappy and afraid.

"I ought to have written you about your mother," he said, "only when you're away you can't think of that happening to people. I'm sorry."

"I know. Mother was always fond of you, Nat."

"She was awfully good to us when we were little, and I'll always remember it."

"Yes," I told him, "she was good to everybody, even when it didn't pay her. I don't mean you by that. Down in the village, I meant." He nodded and I went on after a minute. "But I guess maybe it evens up in the end,—lots of people had more than mother had, and then, lots have had less."

"She had you, Kate," he reminded me, "don't you ever forget it?"

I wanted to cry when he said that.

"Well, but I sort of went back on her, too."

He got up and moved over to the fireplace.

"Those two still at it?" He cocked his head towards the French enamel clock, and though he spoke lightly, he didn't smile. His eyes were so dark and troubled they seemed to have swallowed up half his face. "Father used to say they were killing Time when we asked him what the little men did with their cross-saw. Well, I know now that's not the only kind of murder there is,—not as bad as letting something die that was alive in you before you smothered it."

I felt a chill run along my spine. He was trying to tell me something without saying it right out in so many words.

"Look here, Nat," I went over and stood beside him, "you're worrying because that music of yours hasn't been going right. No, Rissa didn't tell me. I just knew."

He nodded and his face grew less sharp, as if it was a kind of relief to have me say it out plain.

"Well," I went on, "there have to be times when you can't call it up out of yourself. Everything that grows has the privilege of an off-season now and then, I don't know why you shouldn't have the same?"

"Dear Kate," he smiled and shook his dark head, "it isn't as simple as that. I wish it were."

I came to know why he had said that. I knew the first time I saw him with Dora. It annoyed her that he wanted to come over and work alone there at his old piano. She brought him sometimes in the carriage or called to fetch him back and I could see how she got between him and his music.

"Please tell my husband I'm waiting," she would say to me if I happened to be in the garden or hall when she drove over in her little varnished carriage with the fringed canopy. "Tell him to hurry because people are coming for dinner. He's sure to have forgotten."

She was polite enough, but I could tell she disliked me. She remembered that time I had burst out at the supper table. I couldn't blame her for that.

"I thought you were out peddling berries and things—" she asked me curiously one day she came. Her eyes were just the color of a string of amber beads she wore and she looked so cool and crisp in her white silk dress and the small straw hat with its yellow ribbons on her dark curls, that I felt more hot and smudgy than usual. I had just come back from the orchard, but I knew she thought I had been hanging around the parlor to hear Nat.

"It's foolish," she went on, "this notion he has he can't work anywhere but over here. Father made such an effort to get a grand piano and he's hardly touched it." She shrugged and went in to him while I stopped outside to pull some weeds from the border.

They came out presently and drove off. She sat as close to him as she could get, though I noticed she kept the reins. It was her horse and her carriage and she never let him forget that. But they loved to touch each other. They had that between them still.

I didn't ask him what he was working on when I saw his sheets of music about. I thought he would tell me when the time came, and he did.

"I've begun something," he said a week or so later, "and I can feel it's coming right, the way I was afraid it never would again. I found what I wanted to do right here in the east parlor. It's been waiting here for me ever since we were little."

He pointed to the big red book with the poetry and engravings that always lay on the table.

*"Oh, Wedding Guest, this soul hath been
Alone on a wide, wide sea,—
So lonely 'twas that God himself
Scarce seemed there to be."*

"Why, Kate," he stared in surprise to hear me say the words. "I didn't know you knew that!"

"I guess you never knew how Rissa and I used to pore over that book the year you were away on the 'Rainbow'. You know, Nat," I heard myself going on, "it's funny, but I think sometimes it's all decided for us when we're little, the way things are going to be."

"How do you mean,—decided?"

"Well, it seems as if people and things that hurt us or made us real happy then, they go along with us. They're right there, same as that book was on the table. You just had to reach out your hand and take it. I guess it's when we try and cut loose from the way we started out that we get all snarled up."

He didn't say anything to that, only his eyes looked black and shining. All the rest of that day I felt warm and happy and so full of him that I hardly heard what people said to me at the houses I took my baskets to. It was like that up to the very day before he left. I didn't ask him any questions about his music, but I could tell it was coming right. He came over as early as he could every morning and if Dora didn't drag him off he stayed till dark. Once even, he stayed till after supper and I rowed him back to the big lighted house across the water. He wanted to stay on to finish it. I knew that without his saying a word and I knew she was set against it. I knew it before I heard those words they had about it that last afternoon. They were

both in the east parlor and that surprised me for she usually wouldn't come in *The Folly*. I was carrying Henry Willis' supper tray and I heard their voices as I went up the stairs.

"It's you who are being unreasonable, Nat," her high, bright voice came from behind the curtains, "and I certainly don't think it's your place to be, considering everything. I haven't exactly enjoyed being neglected for a month, you know."

"Dora, I've told you how it was, you can see for yourself I've been working the way I haven't in ages, not since we—"

"Since we were married," she broke in with a short laugh, "you might as well say it."

"Well, dear, I told you how it would be when we,—when I asked you to marry me. God knows, I wish I could plug along like some, the way Dick does, but I can't seem to, and when the fit does take me, nothing else matters. I have to give myself to it, that's all. Oh, Dora, it isn't that I mean to neglect you the way you say, but don't you see how it is?"

"I'm certainly beginning to, and father and mother do, too. You can't blame them for feeling hurt after the way they've carried you and done everything for us for over two years."

"I don't wonder they're disappointed in me. I've hated myself for loafing on their money and not being able to follow up the *Ship Symphony* with something better the way everyone expected me to. That's why I must push this through now."

"No one's asking you to stop, but what's the good of that studio we fixed up at home, and that piano and the whole house run to suit your ways? And you have to come over here as if I didn't exist even. I have to come and take you back because you won't remember to unless I do. I have to humiliate myself to that Fernald woman you talk to as if she wasn't a servant. I have to say, 'If you please, is my husband here?' and 'Would you kindly remind Mr. Nathaniel Fortune he has a wife and she's waiting outside?'"

"Oh, Dora, stop. Don't act as if I were a little dog on a string, and don't say things like that about Kate. You can't be jealous of her and this house and my music!"

I was shaking so that I had to set down the tray in the upper hall and lean against the stair railing. I lost her answer, and I wasn't going to listen anymore, but I couldn't help it because they had come out into the lower hall.

"I don't expect you to understand it," he was saying wearily, "but you might trust me and leave me alone for once. I haven't got anything against your father and mother. They've been good to me and I want to show them I can do something even if I can't make money. This place has set me off again. I don't know why, maybe it's because I belong here. You go back with them tomorrow and let me stay on till I've finished. Give me a month longer, maybe six weeks, and I'll come back with something worth listening to. Don't drag me off now just when I'm getting back what I thought I'd lost——"

"You know we're closing the place tomorrow; you've known for weeks."

"But I can stay here, there's plenty of room."

"And you'll be well looked after, I don't doubt that for a minute."

I shivered at the shrillness of her voice coming up to me from below.

"I thought with Rissa away," she was going on bitterly, "there was some chance of my having you to myself for once. Do you think I like making excuses for you when people come and father and mother ask how I like being a widow?"

"Well, if they want to make stupid jokes like that, let them. Oh, Dora, don't let's go on this way, it's horrible after how we've felt about each other. I can't bear it when that note comes in your voice."

Then I heard the front door bang, and when I went down stairs again I found the parlor empty and the carriage gone from the drive. I gathered up his strewn sheets of music and laid them in a neat pile under the weight of "The Ancient Mariner." Those little black dots he had set across the bars seemed alive under my hands. Secret and strange, they had stirred like seeds in his mind, ready to flower into something

lovely and unknown. I traced out the shape of some with my forefinger, and wondered what they would be like turned into sound. I couldn't believe that anyone who loved Nat could help feeling as I did, or ask him to leave them, even for a day.

He came to get his papers the next morning. His face looked drawn and his eyes lustreless when I found him rolling them all together in his case.

"Nat," I faltered, "you're not going?"

"Yes, this afternoon, I didn't tell you before, because I hoped I could have awhile longer."

"You could stay on here," I reminded him.

"I thought of that, but it won't do. You see, Kate, I haven't got just myself to consider now."

"But this music is more yourself than anything else, isn't it?"

He turned his face away and I saw with a pang that he had caught his under lip in, the way he always used to when he was afraid of showing his feelings. I didn't dare say anything more till he had been upstairs to say good-bye to Henry Willis and when he had come back for a last word.

"Well," I told him, "if it's the only way, you go. But you must finish it somehow. Nat, you will try to. You can pretend you're back here in the east parlor at your piano with everything just the same as it's always been."

"I'll try to. Good-bye, Kate, just listen to the crickets out there. They've got a whole month to go it before frost."

We stood quiet a minute by the door and the sound they made in the brown September grass came like a faint pulse beating between us. He didn't need to tell me he envied them.

Well, the frost had come and he and Henry Willis and all the crickets were gone. I thought of it again as I went up in the winter dusk and let myself into The Folly, where everything was still except for the ticking of the French enamel clock. It was a notion of mine to go up and wind it twice a week. It would have seemed like the end of the world to know it had run down.

CHAPTER XXIX

I KNOW now that I was waiting through all that winter and the next summer. I did not know what I was waiting for then, or why I refused to leave Fortune's Folly. I couldn't explain to Sadie what kept me when to her there seemed no reason for my staying. I couldn't tell her what I hardly understood myself.

"Well," she said one day when I stopped in after I had been on my rounds with early raspberries, "I suppose you know what you're up to, but I think it's time you cut loose and made something of yourself 'fore it's too late."

"Oh, I'm not doing so badly with the business," I told her. "I've got steady customers now and I can take more time to track down wild berries and see to the orchard. I'll clear over a hundred dollars this summer, and I can kind of keep an eye on the place, too."

"They'd certainly ought to put 'She stuck by the ship' on your tombstone if that's any comfort to you. It certainly wouldn't be to me."

Things in Little Prospect were booming that season. The new Mountain Spring House had opened and was well filled. I could see its lighted windows on clear nights, and by day dark moving specks that were buckboards on the far stretch of road. The old Tavern was full, too, and the harbor thick with summer craft. There were two mails a day now, and rural free delivery for the more distant cottages. Another store had opened across from Will Stanley's, and Jake's fish business filled a whole building down by the wharf. He had three men running it, for real estate kept him busy in his new office on the main street. It was in the old Captain Wells' house. He had bought it

when he married his school teacher the winter before, and every one said he had set her up handsomely. She seemed a pretty, timid sort of girl with blue eyes and pale, tightly crimped hair. I saw her sometimes when I went to church with Annie and George and when our eyes met I felt as if she were trying to figure out what Jake had ever seen in me.

"They're going to have a baby soon," Sadie told me. "It'll be a boy I expect, the way Jake's luck is running."

In spite of myself I felt a pang. I couldn't help remembering those plans Jake and I had made over in the old Noyes' house. Things like that come back to a woman once she has ever put them in words to a man.

The Drake house on the point had been rented to strangers that summer, so there was no chance for news of Nat from that quarter. But I had ways of finding out about him. Sadie heard remarks from summer visitors when they were in the post office and I had occasional letters from Rissa and Dick Halter. It was from these that I pieced together what I could, and it was not heartening news. His music for "*The Ancient Mariner*" was not finished. He could not seem to get it done though he had made such a good start. Rissa claimed it was all Dora's fault, and the sisters-in-law had quarrelled and parted in bitterness before Rissa had returned to Europe. Dick Halter agreed that Nat was being run ragged with too much going about. His wife's people gave him everything he needed except to be let alone to work in his own way. Yet he did not blame Dora as Rissa did. He felt the trouble was with Nat himself. He couldn't put his finger on the cause. He had talked to the orchestra leader who had taken such an interest in the *Ship Symphony* and the older man had shaken his head. "Better that I should see him starve in a garret," he had said to Dick, "than that his talent should die first." Nat had seemed ill and low spirited all that winter, the letter went on, and the summer had not helped either. They were living in the Drake's house in town, going about on visits to this one and that one. It was no good even asking Nat about his music any more. He seemed to want to avoid it.

I could not sleep the night after Dick Halter's letter came, though the news did not surprise me. I could always feel if things were good or bad with Nat. But I tried to think I could write him a letter. I even got out a sheet of paper and by candle light set down a few lines, but when morning came I tore them up. He knew without my reminding him that The Folly was ready and waiting whenever he wanted to come back. I must keep silent and bide my time. Waiting was something I had learned to do in those years, so I picked my berries and fruit and watched the long blue days shorten to another September.

I watched goldenrod and asters take the roadsides and woodbine curl like flame round The Folly gateposts. I watched the wedges of wild geese go south and the summer people follow them, family by family. Blueberry leaves were reddening the pastures and the early swamp maples and birches already beginning to flare. Another northern summer was on the wane.

George and I had been busy all that week in the orchard. The line storm had stripped the apple trees and we had to sort over the windfalls. It had been a fine crop and I had the best fruit in barrels, while he carted the rest to the cider mill. I worked to fill the last baskets I was delivering to a couple of summer families who had stayed on after the rest. My hands smelled spicy as I picked the roundest and best, and I remember now how the salt spray made them glisten when I rowed the boatload over to Spindle Head.

"You've spoiled us for the kind of apples we get in the city," the woman said to me at the last house. "Well, good-bye till next summer."

"Next summer's a good way off," I reminded her and we both smiled.

It seemed I must have guessed when I said that, all that was just ahead for me. And yet, when I came up from the water and saw Nat there by the summer house, I could hardly credit my eyes. I ran to him, tumbling apples from my unsold basket.

He looked like a ghost of himself as he turned to meet me. It wasn't that he was so pale and thin. I had seen him so before.

But the little pulse in his throat worked the way I hadn't seen it for years, and his eyes had a queer, glazed look. I took his hands and led him into the east parlor.

"Kate," he said, "I guess I shouldn't have come on you like this without any warning, but I couldn't think of anywhere else to go, and I knew you'd be here."

"You did right to come," I told him as I set a match to the fire I had kept laid there for months. "You look worn out, though. I'm going to get you something to drink."

"I walked from Blodgett's Landing," he went on, "at least I guess I did. Someone gave me a lift there from the train."

That was a good five miles, and I knew he wasn't used to such walks, so I flew down cellar for one of the Major's old bottles. He poured himself a glass and his hands shook so a lot spilled on the rug. It brought the color back to his lips again, and I dared to leave him long enough to run down to George and Annie with the news. They were full of questions I couldn't answer, but they gave me the things I needed to cook him some supper. I had the kitchen fire going and the kettle on before dark. I didn't try to think, or even feel, as my hands went from one thing to the next. I crammed wood in the stove and filled lamps and broke eggs in the yellow bowl, and all the time I did that my ears were strained towards the parlor.

"If he goes to the piano," I told myself, "if he plays one little snatch of music, I needn't be afraid for him."

But no sound came. I carried his supper in and there he was still hunched by the fire. He hadn't moved since I left him. I drew a table up and begged him to eat. But he only stared at the food dully.

"Nat," I said, "please eat your supper."

He tried to lift a spoon, but it clattered to the plate again. I reached for it and began to feed him as if he had been a child. Seeing the curly F. on the handle put me in mind of that other homecoming of his, and of how I had remembered the saying: —"That's a spoon you'll sup sorrow with yet." It seemed as if

I must have known all those years ago how it was going to be. Or perhaps it was only that I was beyond surprise by then.

"Kate," he said later when I had carried out the tray and returned to him, "I ought to tell you that things have happened—. You've got a right to know."

"There's nothing you need to tell me, Nat. I've been expecting you back."

"But how could you? Nobody knew I was coming, not even Dora yet. I hardly knew myself till I got on the train last night."

"I didn't know it would be today, but I think I knew it would be soon."

He put his head down on his arms at that and his shoulders shook, though he made no sound and his eyes were dry when I touched his face. It was terrible to feel those long shudders go over him, like waves of despair. I was glad the room was too dark for me to see his face. I held him against the warmth of my body and neither of us spoke for a long time.

"You see, Kate, everything sort of went to pieces," he spoke at last. "We both said some pretty hard things, but I can't blame Dora for feeling the way she does about me. She thought I was different when she married me. I thought I was, too, but I've learned a lot since then. She's better off without me. I guess I'm a Jonah to people, the way it used to be aboard ships. I'm a Jonah to myself, that's the worst of it."

He tried to laugh, but it ended in a dry sob.

"I've been nearly crazy for months. I tried to finish that music. I tried every way I knew, but I can't any more. There used to be an old blind man playing the fiddle at our street corner. He knew just one tune and he played it rain or shine. Every day I passed I'd hear him and think: —'Well, where's the difference between us, except you've given up trying, the way I'll have to soon.' Whenever I dropped anything in his cap I'd feel sort of as if I was paying it back to myself."

"I know,—at least, I know how it seemed to you. But don't think of that any more. Let's remember about when we were little,—you and Rissa and I."

"I don't dare think of Rissa and how she'll feel. She banked everything she had on me, and I went back on her. I tell you, Kate, I hurt whatever I touch, some people do, they're born that way."

"But if you love a person, Nat, it's more than anything they can ever do to you."

"Do you honestly believe that?"

"I know it. I wouldn't lie to you."

"No," he said slowly, "you wouldn't do that."

I felt him quiet down beside me. He sighed and though it came up hard and deep, I knew he had let go of himself a little. His hair felt thick and soft as fur under my cheek and his head heavy between my shoulder and breast. I stayed so still that my hands and feet grew numb. His breathing came easier and I knew he slept. But though he was so slight, his body was like a sagging weight in my arms. I alone stood between him and something dark and terrible that was waiting to swallow him up. I felt it as surely as if I had been trying to get him ashore from the grip of an outgoing tide. I don't know how long we stayed so, but at last I felt the tenseness leave him and I dared to let go my hold.

I couldn't risk trying to get him to bed, so I slipped pillows under his head and straightened out his long legs on the sofa. Then I got a carriage robe from the closet and spread that over him, for the first chill of fall had crept into the house. I had used up all the firewood and I dared not go after more. I felt as spent as the old moon that had climbed up from sea and was shining in through the gap in the spruces. I crouched beside the sofa and leaned my head as close as I could get to his. The deep, drowned bell of the clock told me that it was eleven.

"Time is going right on," I told myself, "I ought to be thinking what to do."

But I couldn't think ahead, only of the past. It seemed to me then that all those years, and there were almost twenty of them all told, Nat and I had been drawing closer and closer to this moment. We hadn't known, going our separate ways, with other

people claiming us and wide seas between, how close we were. What was that Old Lady Phibben had said?—"Hearts may agree, though heads may differ." But she had said other things, too; things that frightened me now, so that I had to creep closer, near enough to feel Nat's living breath on my face.

"I had rather he came to me now," I thought, "even more than if he had told me he loved me that night of his music. He hasn't said so, but I know he does. He could have got on a ship and gone to Rissa, but he didn't. He came straight here to me. He needs me and that's the surest way of knowing."

Loving Nat wasn't anything new to me. I guessed that the roots of that went way back to the first night I ever set foot in Fortune's Folly. If I had married Jake Bullard—? But I hadn't. Nat should have anything he wanted of me, or nothing if he wanted that more. He stirred beside me and muttered something low. I caught Dora's name. Once that would have hurt me, but I was past minding.

I must have dozed there on the floor beside him, for I woke stiff and chilled. Outside the moon had climbed from sight, though its watery brightness filled the room, touching familiar things into strangeness,—the family portraits in their frames; the gilding of the French enamel clock; Rissa's muffled harp; the rosewood piano, and even my own broad hand as I moved cramped fingers. It showed me Nat's face, and that was strange, too. Sleep had stripped him bare of pride, and tumbled the hair boyishly on his forehead. Yet it could not make him look young again. There were faint hollows at his temples and round his closed eyes; his lips drooped at the corners. But it was at his hands that I looked longest, staring at them as if I did not already know their shape by heart; wondering if those long fingers would ever again shake off their laxness to beckon torrents of sound to do his bidding?

The moonlight dwindled, and the tides of morning began to creep up over the eastern sky. I went to the window and watched the outer islands swim, black and bushy, in a kindled sea. The single eye of Whale Back Light was snuffed out in flame and

rose. I have seen others as bright and pulsing as that sunrise, and I shall see many more from sea-turned windows before I die, but I shall never feel myself so stirred by cross-currents as I was then. I knew pure joy that morning, and for every drop of it that welled up in me, fear was there in equal measure. I knew that must always be the penalty of love.

George would be coming to the barn to milk the cow he kept there, and I slipped out to join him. We talked in whispers though there was no need of that, away from the house as we were.

"What beats me is how could he walk all that ways if he's sick as you say he is?" George went on with the milking, and mechanically I got out the corn and began to shell it for the hens.

"He is sick, George, but not the way anybody round here would understand. I guess it's mostly in his mind, and that's why I'm so afraid for him."

"Why didn't she come along with him then, same's you'd expect a wife to?"

"That's part of the trouble, George, I guess she and he have broken up, sort of."

"That so? Well, I'm not much surprised. They stuck it out longer'n I thought they would. The point is what to do with him now he's here and Rissa on the other side of the Atlantic."

"Do?" I repeated, "Why, I'm going to move right back to The Folly and look after him. I'll write to Dick Halter, and he can tell Rissa if he wants to. I'm not going to. I think Nat's better off without her for awhile."

"But, Kate, it don't look right your being up there alone with him." He slapped the cow's flank and moved the pail back out of the way of her switching tail before he went on awkwardly. "You know's well as I do it don't take much to get folks jawing, and this is bound to give 'em an awful good chance."

"I know. But I don't believe I care what they say."

"Well, that's your lookout. I only thought I'd ought to mention it in case you hadn't thought that far ahead."

"I'm not going to think ahead, if I can just get him through today and then tomorrow and then maybe the one after—. And you explain it to Annie some way, I don't feel as if I could scream it all out to her right now. I'm too tired, and I haven't had my clothes off all night."

"You trust me, Kate. I'll be back soon's the chores are done to get that letter and fetch up anything you need from the store."

He gave me a keen look before he led the cow back to her stall, and the kindness in his washed-out blue eyes is something I have always cherished.

CHAPTER XXX

It is hard for me to write of those next months. The long white page lies waiting before me and the ink dries on the point of my pen. For where shall I find words fit for the wonder of love; how shall a pen be dipped deep enough in the heart to set them down?

Always before I had shared Nat with others, and now there was no one to break into the strange spell of those days and nights together. We were somehow part of that northern fall. I like to think that our happiness was bound up in the brightness of maple and birch leaf; in the sharp sweetness of resin on falling cones. We were one with crickets, taking no heed of tomorrow's frost. Fortune's Folly sheltered us. We took refuge in it from the world and the weather as squirrels might in a hollow tree.

I knew what they said in Little Prospect. They had ugly names for us from the first. But it didn't matter to me then or now. How could it when I saw Nat's dark eyebrow lift in the old amused way again, or heard him laugh out at some word of mine? For he came to joke again as I had feared he never would. I even dared to hope that he would open the piano and let music take him once more, if only we might be given time enough. No, I didn't care what anyone thought or said.

Those early weeks he seemed in a daze. He would sit and watch me as I went about, doing the small things that made us comfortable. His eyes stayed dull and remote and his hands would hold anything I put into them without noticing what he held. He did not speak to me of himself with the troubled bitterness of that first night. I did not press him to tell me any-

thing more. He ate what I set before him and let me do for him in little ways. I had some medicine left that used to help Henry Willis go to sleep, and I gave it to him if he seemed restless or wakeful. I moved my belongings into Rissa's old room where I could hear his slightest sound.

I could hardly open the letter from Dick Halter when it came at last. But I needn't have been afraid. He was glad that Nat was back with me. He believed it was Nat's best chance of getting himself in hand again. He had tried to see Dora, but she wouldn't hear of it. She and her family were very bitter. There was no chance of her trying to patch things up. He didn't know how much Rissa knew, but he hoped he had done right to tell her he was looking out for Nat who needed to work things out for himself before she came. He would come if I sent for him and he enclosed a check for a hundred dollars, not knowing how Nat was fixed for money. I was to keep him posted, and he would do anything he could.

I sent George to Rockland to get the money and bring back supplies. I didn't mind taking it from Dick Halter, but Little Prospect would have found too much to talk about in that.

And then a day or two later a whole sheaf of mail came for Nat. He turned the letters over without a sign of interest except for two. One of the envelopes was addressed in Rissa's writing and I guessed the other was from Dora. He put them in his pocket, but I know he read late in his room that night. It was several days before he spoke to me of them.

"Rissa's gone to Sicily with some people," he said casually, looking up from his breakfast as if we had just been speaking of her, "And Dora's going away, too. She doesn't say where, but I'm not invited."

"Do you mind that?" I thought the moment had come to put the question to him straight.

He shook his head.

"Don't you know without my telling you, Kate?"

"Yes, Nat, but I wanted to hear you say it. I won't speak of it again. Here's some hot coffee."

He smiled at me as I took his cup and it seemed to me that the strain had left his face a little and his eyes were almost cleared of their misery.

I felt light hearted that morning as I hadn't since his return. I went out with the shears to the flower borders to cut the stalks down and gather a last bunch of marigolds and button chrysanthemums. I sang as I moved about, what I always sang when I was happy because it was all tied up with Nat and the past:—

*"O come all ye faithful,
Joyful and triumphant—"*

I must have let myself go, out there in the October wind and sun, for presently Nat came out and joined me.

“Don’t stop,” he said as I broke off, “I like to hear you.”

“Even when I get off the tune, and you know I do, Nat?”

“Yes,” he insisted, “even then. It isn’t like singing the way you do it.”

“I guess that’s the truth,” I laughed, “mother used to say I’d mumble along on the same note for hours and never know it.”

“You do, but I don’t mind. It’s sort of like the wind worrying the spruces, low down, and all in one key.”

It was the nearest he had come to speaking of tunes and notes since he came back.

“Remember the way you twisted the words round for us that time we went after Christmas greens? There’ll be black alder berries pretty soon down by the swamp.”

“Yes,” he said, “remember Frisky done up in that blue scarf with the fringes? You know, Kate, it’s good to be able to say ‘do you remember’ to someone and not have it hurt you too much.”

He helped me cover the stone Buddha, and that afternoon we went down to George and Annie’s little house and helped rake leaves and dead stalks for a bonfire. We piled them near the Creek and watched them burn till the tide crept up and put the fire out. It was a cold, still twilight and the western sky

stayed lemon yellow long after the sun was down and the light-house bright across the Narrows. We walked up the drive together under the spruces, carrying a basket of turnips between us.

"Kate," he said suddenly after we set the basket down and went into the dim kitchen, "you're so good to me and I've been the worst kind of a fool."

"I guess there are worse things than being foolish," I told him and my heart began to beat the way I thought it never would again.

"And that isn't the half of it, my dear." His arms were round me and his face buried in my hair. "There's no one like you, Kate. I've always taken that for granted, but this afternoon when you were out there burning the leaves,—. Your hair smells of them still."

Even when we lighted the lamp and ate the supper I cooked, the sense of tingling contentment stayed with us. Whether we spoke or were silent it was there, wrapping us like a warm mist.

"You know that picture Dick painted of you?"

"Yes, Nat, you never told me if you liked it."

"I got back just in time to see his exhibition that Spring. It took Dick to show me what you were like. I think I never really saw you till then. There were lots of people in the gallery and I wanted them to clear out. I resented it that they were seeing you that way, too."

"I'm glad, but that was Dick Halter's doing. He made me look better than I do."

"No, he caught you right. I don't mean just the color of your hair and eyes and the shape of your body and the rest. He made you seem all warm and strong and—free, the way you are."

"But I've never been free in all my life. I've been tied here, hand and foot."

"Trees are rooted, but they're free to grow. They don't put up things to set in their own way. That's what I mean about you. You just take hold where you are, and strike down deep, the way I can't seem to—"

"Oh, Nat, don't say that. I don't want you to be any different from what you are, except maybe happier."

"I know you don't. You never have. Dora wasn't like that. She was always trying to make me into someone I wasn't and never could be. Rissa did too, in her way. It's been hell these last three years trying to suit them both and feeling the best of me slipping away like sand."

"You'll get it back, Nat, you give yourself time."

"Time gets into everything we say somehow," he sighed. "It's there ticking away whatever we try to do."

"But you said once there had to be a beat behind everything in the world."

"Did I? You've got the queerest way, Kate, of giving me back things I said and have forgotten."

He reached out across the table and took my hands that were square and rough in his smooth, thin fingers. Then he bent and kissed them. I could feel his lips through the calloused places on my palms.

Rain shut us in for the better part of a week. Fortune's Folly needed paint and patching, but the roof was tight. We two were snug against the wind and wet as if we were riding out the storm in some old ship under reefed sail.

"We might be Mr. and Mrs. Noah in the Ark," Nat said after two days of it, "with all the world drowned except for us and the animals."

"I wouldn't mind having a few of them aboard," I told him, "the small sized ones,—not the elephants and kangaroos."

"Or that dove," he went on with his eyebrow cocked. "I'd have hated to hear her everlasting coos."

"I know. Those pigeons Bo kept always sounded like porridge bubbling on the stove, just when it's going to stick."

Yes, we said silly things like that. I think it must be that way with people who love each other, even in the face of danger and trouble. I think the old saying that honey tastes sweetest licked off a briar must mean that. I know it was so with us.

But there were other times when Nat couldn't get free of his

old despair. It would sit on him black as the shadow of a crow's wing. Then there was nothing for me to do but wait for the spell to pass. Once I remember I thought to rouse him from one of these moods by bringing out the green and gold copy of Hans Andersen's tales that we three had pored over years ago. It pleased him to see it again and I left him reading it by the fire while I went down to George and Annie's through the rain. He made no mention of it when I returned, but later I took the book from the shelf and saw that he had turned down a page of "The Nightingale" and set a mark beside the Nightingale's farewell to the Emperor:—"One thing I beg of you. Tell no one that you have a little bird who tells you everything. Then it will go all the better."

I guessed what had made him do that. I knew as if he had told me he felt that he had betrayed his secret bird of song. I knew he had seen himself, and not the Chinese Emperor of the story, dying because he had lost the power to summon it to him once more. Queer that it should always have been his favorite tale; almost as if he had known.

"It's Hallowe'en," I told him after we had eaten our supper, "I'd forgotten till George reminded me this afternoon. I guess there won't be many children out with jack-o'-lanterns tonight."

"George used to make beauties for us," he said, "those big ones he'd set up on the gateposts by the road. Do you believe in ghosts, Kate?"

"I don't know. Do you, Nat?"

"Sort of. I could believe in the ghosts of ships beating it back through the Narrows a night like this, full rigged, like the ones father and grandfather built."

"I could believe better in that old Medicine Man from Indian times who could call up storms with his spells. Right here where The Folly stands they say he used to do it. Remember how you and Rissa and I would listen for his tom-tom."

"It's a pretty wet night even for a Medicine Man to be out."

We put on more wood and drew closer on the hearth rug.

The wilder it blew and pelted outside, the more comforting was our security.

"I felt like a ghost when I came back a month ago, Kate," Nat spoke low from my lap where he had laid his head.

"You looked like one. Oh, Nat, don't ever feel that way again."

Tears sprang to my eyes then, though I had not shed any before. He saw them on my cheeks and drew me down beside him. We were very close in the warmth of the fire and our two bodies.

"Don't, Kate," he whispered, "I'm not worth your crying about."

I saw his face blurred above me. It looked high and strange the way far cliffs and islands will be magnified in that mingling of sun and mist we call land-looms.

"I've tried not to know how we felt for a long time," he was saying, "last summer, I think I did, but I tried to tell myself it was just for old times' sake. I couldn't bear to hurt you, too, Kate."

"You couldn't, no matter what."

"I'll go away again, I won't make more of a mess than I have already."

"No. I want you to stay. I kind of think it was meant to be for both of us."

"You don't know what you're saying, my dear. I know so much better than you do."

"I know I wouldn't take all the rest of my life for what little we've had, and now you talk about leaving me."

"I don't want to leave you, God knows!" he gave a sort of groan before he went on. "Oh, Kate, it isn't the way it ought to be, for you at least. I've come back here so different from what I was when I started out. I can't go on taking everything you've got to give. I ought to have pride enough left not to let you."

"What's pride got to do with us, Nat, except to get in the way of our feelings? I never thought you could want me like this. It seems like some kind of miracle."

He buried his face against me for a long time. I didn't dare say any more, but I could feel him trembling. His forehead was damp under his hair.

"Kate," he said at last, "are you sure?"

→ "Very sure, I think I've always been."

But it would have been the same if he had not asked and if I had not answered. I hardly felt the stairs under my feet, though I heard the familiar creak of loose boards as I followed him up.

It was my turn to tremble.

"You're not frightened, are you?" He spoke out of the darkness.

"Only that you may be disappointed in me, Nat. You see, I've never—and I wish I could be beautiful for you tonight instead of the way I am, clumsy and—"

He kissed me into silence.

"That's like you, Kate, to make it seem as if you're not giving me the most precious thing a woman can give."

"But it's not precious till someone you love needs it. Oh, Nat—"

I woke to darkness and the steady drip of rain. He was still there. I felt his chin pressing my shoulder; his arm flung across me, heavy with sleep, and I knew it had not been a dream. I was glad he could sleep like that beside me. My body felt light and far removed from my mind and all that it would carry to the grave. Whatever happened, this had been. I told myself that, over and over. What must it be like, I thought, to know it when you were young and untroubled, without the busy, lonely years of waiting between? It couldn't be the same, for how could the careless and happy have strength to bear this fierce necessity of the flesh that was high and swift as a full-moon tide, and yet simpler than the push of roots and mounting sap? I couldn't reconcile it with happiness as I had known that before; this was too secret and strange.

Fortune's Folly seemed alive with faint rustlings as I lay there and waited for morning. I could have believed that the very walls and unseen furniture were somehow aware of us and

our love. I thought of the past; of those other men and other women who had lain there before us; their bodies as warm and comforted as ours. Time out of mind it must have been so. They had had their fill of one another, and listened to just such northeast weather at the window pane. But they had been secure in their love as I knew we could never be.

That night had taken me beyond the safe and ordered limits of convention, of respectability as Little Prospect knew it. I was as sure of that as if I were already out past the sheltering spruces in all the wet and wild. Sadie had been there before me. She knew how it was out there, though she had somehow got back. But she had never dared to love a Fortune.

"No port too far for Fortune pines to cast their shadows." I hadn't heard the saying since I was a child. It was queer to lie there and remember it after all those years. The trees were down and the ships scattered, but shadows were not so easily shaken off. They stayed and they grew longer and longer as shadows will in late afternoon. Rissa and Nat would never be free of them. I might have been once, but not now. I didn't want to be.

One of George's roosters crowed through the rain with a rusty sound. Soon I would slip from under the covers and go down to rebuild the fires and start the round of chores. I would do them as I had yesterday and the day before and the one before that. I would look and act the same as I always had. You didn't change, you only knew what was behind it all, as you knew the star-shaped core that lies hidden in every apple.

Nat stirred in his sleep.

"Dear," he muttered drowsily as I drew away without wak-ing him.

Shivering there in the dim chillness I got into my clothes and crept downstairs. Maybe I ought to have felt guilty and ashamed, but I couldn't somehow. It seemed right to me then: it does now.

CHAPTER XXXI

IT SEEMED almost as if the weather were on our side, for November stayed mild and pleasant. Only at night the chill came up from the water, and we were proof against that. Sometimes we took our lunch in a basket and rowed up the inlet past the shuttered summer places till we found a sheltered cove or some patch of woods where we could pick wintergreen and partridge berries. Nat wore the Major's old fur-lined overcoat. It was much too big for him, so that he could fling a corner of it over me if we crept close together. The fur was worn and it smelled of camphor and tobacco. To this day those two are mixed up for me with the sharper fragrance of balsam and pitch and damp leaf-mold.

"You've got a nose like a hound for scents," Nat told me on one of these jaunts. "I suppose it's because you've never been distracted by things away from this place."

"I went all the way to New York to your concert," I reminded him, and then I was frightened at what I had said.

"Yes," his eyes narrowed miserably at the memory. "Lord, but that seems ages ago, and yet it isn't four years till next March. I don't know how I came to throw them away like that and myself along with them."

"You mustn't say such things. This is just a sort of in-between time."

"It's a comfort to hear you say that even if I can't quite believe it. Oh, Kate, I wish we could go back to then."

"I wish so for you," I brushed a leaf from his dark hair. "But I don't for myself."

"It hasn't been easy for you either. I know that and I'm not

making it any easier now. Kate, I never knew anyone could be the way you are to me. I can look at you and feel your love running over, and yet you're not always asking something of me,—something I haven't got it in me to give. You'll almost get me to believe that I can do things again."

Looking at him there beside me I saw that his face had lost the clouded-over look that had filled me with panic a month and a half ago. It was as thin, but not tightened with pain. His eyes might never again have the old clearness and self-confidence, but they were no longer dull and lack-lustre.

"Oh, God, give us awhile longer together, just a little while," I prayed wordlessly.

"What made you look like that just now? What were you thinking?"

"Just about us, and how many things have happened and how lots more are bound to. It's queer, Nat, how I never thought I hoped for this, but I know now I did, the way it says in the Bible,—'Hope deferred maketh the heart sick, but when the desire cometh it is a tree of life.'" I broke off and smiled at him, "I don't know how it is, but I always seem to get back to trees somehow."

He smiled at that and laid his cheek to mine.

"You remember the most surprising things, Kate, and when you say them, they seem all your own, not words out of a book."

We were quiet again for a long time with only the sound of water and branches and a distant squirrel's scolding to keep us company.

"I wonder if being dead is like this," he spoke as if he were thinking aloud, "just lying quiet in some secret hollow. I shouldn't mind much if it is, only your cheek's too warm for that. You've warmed me back to life, Kate, that's what you've done."

"Don't talk about being dead."

"Lots of people ought to be under the ground who aren't. I was that way before I came back to you."

"You're not sorry you came, are you, Nat?"

"No, but it's going to hurt coming to, again."

"Just at the beginning, the way it does when your foot's been asleep and you feel those pins and needles——"

"Pins and needles in your mind are the sharpest kind."

"Yes, but that's better than being numb."

"You're right. I know it now. Well," he pulled himself up, so that he sat looking down at me, "that means I ought to begin thinking ahead, for your sake as much as mine."

"You'd better leave me out of that, Nat."

"But I can't any more, dear, not after what we've come to be to each other. I can't think of going on without you. I've taken so much more than I can possibly give you back, not even if I ever do get free of the snarl I'm in. I'll make it up to you, Kate, some way."

How queer that he should have said that, using the very words of my promise to him, years ago, when two children comforted each other across a window sill. I could feel how hot the tin roof had been under my bare feet and how small and helpless he had looked, leaning out between the curtains. Tears came into my eyes, remembering.

"What have I said to make you cry?"

"You've forgotten, I expect, but I said I'd make it up to you some way that time your father punished you when he caught you at the piano. It was my fault for not seeing him on the bridge."

"You've made it up to me a hundred times over. It's my turn now."

But I shook my head.

"I know what you mean, Nat, and I'll never forget your wanting to, only I've had so much already, so much more than lots of people have——ever."

"But you must want more. Any woman that's made the way you are, must. I won't listen to you when you talk like that. Maybe I'm not free yet, but when I am——."

His hands were quick and cool on my forehead and hair.

"There's Rissa, Nat. You know how it'll be when she comes back."

He sighed and looked away.

"She won't stand in our way when she knows how we feel."

"Oh, Nat, I know better than you do. We can't always ~~stay~~ like this, two people loving each other in an old house."

"You've shown me that love can be simple and easy and right."

"It is. It is!"

"Then let's leave it at that." He took my hands and pulled me up to my feet beside him.

"Let me row the boat back," he said going down to the water before me. "I know you're better at it, but I need to warm up."

"All right, Nat, only you mustn't get blisters on your hands."

Little by little I was beginning to remind him of his music, and because he no longer winced at the mention I dared to have hope again, though the piano still stayed closed in the east parlor.

I left him to carry our basket back to the house while I ran down to the post box by the gates. We had been off in the boat when the postman stopped at noon. I had come to dread going down to open the box, and that afternoon what I had feared was waiting inside. It was lying on top of a little pile of letters, a thin envelope with foreign stamps. My heart gave a lurch, not because the writing was Rissa's but because it was addressed to "Nathaniel Fortune, Little Prospect, Maine." She knew where he was or she would have sent it to New York, in Dick Halter's care. I leaned against the nearest gatepost, turning it over and over in my hands.

"She's found him out," I thought, "and she'll never let him stay on here. She knows how I feel about him. I'm sure she's known ever since the concert, though she'd never admit it. Next thing she'll be coming to take him away. I know she will, before he's ready to go. Oh, I won't try to hold him back when the

time comes that he wants to go himself, but I can't let her come between us now."

Maybe it was because I had had so few letters in my life and those so precious to me, that I felt the way I did about them. They always seemed sacred to me. They do still, and I think I would sooner commit robbery than tamper with a mail bag. But I was desperate that day. The thought of how Nat had been when he came and the painful way he had crawled back to something like his old looks and ways goaded me to do what I did. I guess I would have done almost anything short of murder to give us more time. I couldn't bring myself to tear that letter to bits, but I did stuff it inside my dress where it lay like a weight as I went back along the drive.

"Some day when he seems a whole lot better," I tried to ease myself, "I'll bring it out to him. But I can't run the risk of getting him all upset now. Rissa can't always have her way."

The sun was dropping and the spruce trunks burned red in the low light, as they had long ago on that other afternoon. The long rays shifted from tree to tree, one fading as another was touched to strange brightness. I started, remembering how I had been so sure that was how it must be with people, never the same light on them at the same time. It had been a long time reaching me, but my turn had come at last.

And then I stopped short in sight of The Folly, with my hands pressed so hard on my chest that the corners of Rissa's envelope cut into me. Nat was playing the piano, and I stood there shaking with relief at the faint sound.

I wanted to run to him, but I knew I mustn't. I made myself go round to the back door, and I stepped softly about the kitchen, fearful that the clatter of a dish might disturb him. The music came in broken snatches. I could tell he was feeling his way, as if he were hunting for an old path, so overgrown it might be easily lost. Sometimes he stopped and seemed to be groping in thickets of sound. I held my breath till I heard it come clear and true again.

"He's safe," I thought, "at least he's beginning to be."

I stuffed the letter as far back as it would go in the cupboard, and went down cellar to see what I could find in the preserve closet. It was almost emptied of jars, but there was one of the spiced quinces that mother had put up her last fall and I decided to open that. I would put it in the best glass bowl, and bring up some of the dandelion wine, for this would be a night to remember always. It hadn't been easy tempting Nat's appetite with plain fare. I was trying to make Dick's money go as far as it could and I had had to buy coal and supplies from the store. But we managed. There were eggs and milk and our own winter vegetables. George dug me clams when the tide was out by the Creek, and sometimes I fished for flounder and cod and haddock. I had made a chowder the day before. It always tasted better warmed over, though if I had known what we were to celebrate I would have contrived to get a lobster.

I was just brightening up the fire when I heard wheels on the drive and I felt suddenly all in a panic as I hurried out to the front door. Nat was so intent at the piano that he never heard me go through the hall. I shut the front door softly and leaned against it. Darkness was coming fast, though it was lighter there than in the house. I stared at the carriage and made out the minister and his wife. From the moment I set eyes on them I mistrusted their errand.

"Good evening, Mr. Dearborn," I said. "Good evening, Mrs. Dearborn."

I moved to the bottom step and I guess something in my manner kept them from getting out of the carriage.

"Ah, good evening, Miss Fernald," he said in the voice that I had never liked much in the pulpit and that I resented more out of it. "I'm glad to find you in. Mrs. Dearborn and I stopped earlier this afternoon, but no one answered the bell."

"So we thought we'd try again on our way back," his wife put in, a trifle nervously, I thought.

She was about my own age and we had never exchanged more than a few words on Sundays, and when mother and Henry Willis died. I wouldn't have minded if it had been Reverend

Chase. He was a kind old man who had been fond of Major Fortune and had watched us grow up from children. But I represented this young pair and their prying. I wasn't going to make things easier by any chit-chat, or ask them to come in. My silence didn't help.

"Miss Fernald," he began again awkwardly, "I know it's rather an inconvenient time for callers, but, as my wife says, we tried earlier. I hope you can give us a few minutes now, and perhaps Mr. Fortune, too, if he is able."

"He can't see anyone," I said stiffly. "What do you want me for?"

"Miss Fernald," he half rose in the seat and threw back the rug, "you've been on my mind a great deal lately. As a member of my little flock I have been with you in your times of bereavement, and since your dear mother is gone, I felt that I couldn't very well stay away when you are in such special need of counsel and advice."

"Get out, Lester," his wife urged him, "I'm sure Miss Fernald doesn't mean to keep us out here in the cold, even if she did forget to invite us in." She spoke in a way that turned me hard.

"No," I said quietly, "I didn't forget to. We can talk right here."

Their horse was a friendly, fat old sorrel who nuzzled at my hand for sugar. I rubbed the soft nose as I waited.

"Well, I must say I never thought we'd be treated like this—" Mrs. Dearborn spoke low to her husband, but she wanted me to hear.

"You must know I only came out of the interest I feel for you, and because of my position." It had grown so dark by that time that his voice came out of a muffled figure. I was glad we could no longer see each other's faces clearly. "We've missed you from church for a good many Sundays lately."

"I guess you managed all right without me!" I knew I shouldn't have spoken like that, but I'd have said anything to make them leave. Only one part of me was listening to what he

said, the rest was straining to make sure the piano didn't stop inside.

"Miss Fernald, please," his voice broke off as if he were too pained to go on, but when I stayed silent he had to. "I've come to you because I don't want to believe all the unpleasant things I hear. I'm sure you can set them right if you will only drop this hostility and believe that I came because my heart prompted me to."

"Did it?" I heard myself answering him. "I thought maybe it was something else."

"But what else could you think?"

"Well, there's curiosity."

"Lester," his wife's voice was sharp enough to cut ice, "you'd better get right to the point and ask her about—him."

"I'm sure," he cleared his throat cautiously, "you don't want to put yourself and Mr. Fortune in a false position. A word to the wise is sufficient, and you must know it isn't at all wise, or—or right for you to be staying up here alone with him. He's a married man, isn't he?"

"Yes."

I could hear him make a disapproving click, and I thought I saw her edge closer to him on the seat.

"Then certainly his wife should be with him, especially if his health hasn't been all it should be, as I've heard."

"Well, she isn't here." The piano had stopped and I was nothing but a pair of listening ears.

"That is most unfortunate. But he has a sister; it seems to me that one or the other of them—. Miss Fernald, I can see you don't know much about the ways of the world, living off here like this, but you must see how it looks to others."

"I do. I can guess what they're saying."

"Then there's no excuse, and you mustn't let it go on. If he,—if Mr. Fortune isn't able to leave, you must get someone to help you care for him."

"I'll manage all right, thank you," I hardly knew my own voice it had grown so grim. "George Button helps me out."

"That's not enough. I mean you should have someone staying here under the same roof."

I heard the piano begin again faintly, but I was afraid it might stop short any minute. I felt badgered and desperate. I hated their smug curiosity, as they sat above me secure and complacent in their married love.

"Mr. Dearborn," I said firmly, "I didn't ask you to come, but I'm going to ask you to go now."

"Well, of all things. Lester, don't sit there and let her go on insulting you."

"My dear, I'm only trying to be charitable. I couldn't bear if it were ignorance or—"

"Ignorance, humph! I told you all along she knew what she was up to."

I saw him gather up the reins, but he hesitated and leaned over the dashboard towards me.

"You can at least think over what I've said, Miss Fernald. Even if you have perhaps yielded to an impulse, you must know that two wrongs can never make a right."

"I'm not so sure they can't sometimes. And then, who knows what's wrong and what isn't?"

"Well, I must leave you to your own conscience. If I might have been permitted to see Mr. Fortune—"

"Leave him out of this, please."

"I only wish it were possible to."

"Perhaps she likes to make a scandal in the neighborhood. We'd better be starting back, Lester."

"There's a part in the Bible I wish you'd read through tonight when you get home." Even in the dimness I could see how Mr. Dearborn started at my words. "It's called 'The Song of Songs' and King Solomon made it up."

"I'm already familiar with it," I heard him give a sort of gulp, "and I know there are some parts that might be misinterpreted."

"Well, you read it again, Mr. Dearborn, that's all I've got to say."

He didn't need his wife to remind him to go then. I watched the spruces swallow up the shape of horse and carriage. I didn't turn back to the house till I heard the wheels go over the bridge.

"Hello," Nat called to me, "I was just going to light the lamp. Where've you been all this time? I thought I heard voices and wheels out there."

"Just people on an errand. I got rid of them."

"Glad you did,—Kate, listen—. Hey, what's the matter?"

I had tried to light the lamp for him, but my hands shook so the chimney fell and splintered.

"Watch where you step, dear, there's glass all under foot. Wait, I'll get a light from the kitchen."

"Why, you're shaking all over." He followed me out and lit the kitchen one for me. "You look white and sort of funny. Did anything happen?"

"No, Nat, except hearing you at the piano again after all this time——"

I hid my face against his coat and he held me close.

"I believe you care almost more than I do about that, and yet you don't ask me to tell you anything, not even when you look at me."

"You don't have to tell me things, Nat."

"I know. That's why I want to. Only I mustn't yet. It's so easy to lose music the way the Chinese Emperor lost his little nightingale. But if I find I can compose again and this ever does get finished, it'll be all yours. And, oh, I meant to ask you if there's any of that paper around to write it on?"

"You left some years ago. I put it in that chest in your room. You'll find it there with a lot of your old things."

While he was rummaging upstairs I fixed our supper and carried it in to the east parlor. Sometimes Nat took a bite with me in the kitchen, but it never seemed right that he should. I had everything spread on a table by the fire when he came down. The curtains were drawn against the dark, and I lit candles on the mantelpiece as well as the lamp with the crystal icicles. The face of the French enamel clock shone round and bright as a

sunflower. The fire burned softly and our chowder steamed in the old blue bowls. I had got out the bird-patterned plates and polished the reddest apples I could find for a centerpiece. Nat took it all in at a glance.

"You're pretty lavish with the illuminations, aren't you?" He raised his eyebrow in amusement. "Not to mention all this." He waved at the preserves and the bottle of wine.

"It's a great occasion," I reminded him. "I had to get us something special."

"Darling Kate," his face looked almost young again in the soft light, "you act like a little girl tonight. You'd look like one, too, if you took the pins out of your hair. Take them out, do."

"Oh, Nat,—pigtales at my age?"

But I let him pull them out. I didn't care how foolish I looked if it pleased him. Even now I can warm myself at the remembrance of that night. We drank to each other in the dandelion wine. It tasted smooth and sunny, as if all those hundreds of yellow blossoms that had gone into its making were somehow distilled into liquid light that became, in turn, a part of us and our joy. The candles and the fire laid a sort of elegance on the shabby furniture; the apples took on a peculiar lustre, and the little woodsmen came out again and again. I didn't begrudge them their part in our feast. They had been through despair with us, so why should they not share this also? Nat did not go to the piano again, but he had no need to. Not even the thought of Rissa's hidden letter, or the echo of the Reverend Dearborn's words, though I felt them both there in the back of my mind, was able to break my happiness. Nothing seemed real except that we were there together.

CHAPTER XXXII

You may not guess till the earth crumbles under foot how near you were to the edge of a precipice. I can see so well now how it was, but if I had that time to live over again, I have no doubt I should have done as I did.

Nat was composing music for the story of "The Nightingale." That much he told me. He was not sure enough of himself to take up the score of "The Ancient Mariner", which had for him such bitter associations. But this tale of the Chinese Emperor and the little gray bird had taken hold of him, exactly fitting the state of his own mind. His eyes brightened in almost their old way as he told me about it.

"It's a good thing we touched at a Chinese port or two when I went on the 'Rainbow,'" he said, "that'll help me with the court music and the Chinese drums. I've got the theme already, and the waltz, for the artificial bird always sang a waltz, you know. And, Kate, do you remember the girl in it, the one who knew where the real nightingale sang in the wood?"

"The kitchen maid? Yes, I remember."

"Well, she's you. You'd have known where to find that bird. I'll make that part like you. You'll know when you hear it."

"Oh, Nat," I said, "I'm glad. It was always your story."

He worked very hard those next weeks and I let him. I knew it would do him more good than any medicine. My only dread was at noon when the mail was delivered. I would make myself hurry down to the box, and if I found it empty my heart would beat easily again. The thought of another letter from Rissa hung over me. It was on my mind almost as much as the unopened one I kept out of sight on the kitchen shelf. I had done

right not to let him have it. I was more than ever sure as I watched him at the piano. If only I could put back all the clocks in the world till he could finish his work.

A week or so after my visit from the minister, I found a note from Sadie in the box. "I've got to see you some way, Kate," she had scribbled. "I can't get off for long now I have the whole post office on my hands. But Louis can keep it for a couple of hours and I'll come as far as the old schoolhouse day after tomorrow, so meet me there if you can by the middle of the afternoon. Sadie." She hadn't asked me to come to her house, I guessed she wanted to spare me the looks I was certain to get in Little Prospect. Sadie knew all about that. No matter what kind of a fool she thought me, she would never forget the time she had been out of favor. Yes, it would be a comfort to talk to her.

They had built a new brick schoolhouse nearer to the village several years back. A rich summer family had bought the land and taken the old one with it. They had put up a big house with stone work and wide piazzas on the ledge behind, but it had amused their children to play in the school, so they had kept it unchanged. I reached it ahead of Sadie that December afternoon, and peered in the south windows. It wasn't as neat as it had been once. Those new children hadn't much use for the things we had looked upon with respect. There were pictures and scribblings on the blackboards and walls; papers and books were scattered about the floor and a forgotten doll perched impudently on the teacher's desk. I longed to get in and set it to rights for old time's sake. It seemed so long since I had hung my lunchpail in the entry and slid into that corner seat. But almost longer ago since the night it had sheltered Bo and me from the blizzard and I had come to know my own heart while I waited for morning beside the iron stove. If I could have known then, I thought, if I could have guessed that Nat would come back to want and need me, how much less bitter some of those last seven years might have been. Jacob in the Bible had served seven years and then another seven for Rachel and it had

seemed but a few days to him because of his love. But he had known his reward.

The old engravings of the poets still hung in their familiar places, too high to have been tampered with by those other children. Their faces had looked down on me so many years they were like old friends. I greeted them through the pane of glass;—Mr. Longfellow, Mr. Lowell, Mr. Bryant, Mr. Whittier, with their beards, and Mr. Poe, who had none. He had always been my favorite because he had no beard and because of his sad dark eyes. His hair was black and grew off his brow the way Nat's did. I had always noticed that, but now the resemblance was stronger. I saw that they both had the same air of careless melancholy; the same look, as if an inner fire were slowly eating them away. He hadn't been a good man like the rest. He had come to a bad end the reader had said, but he had written "Annabel Lee" which had made me cry whenever the teacher read it to us. I would make Nat read it to me again to-night. I wanted to hear it in his deep voice. "Tonight," I said aloud, just as if thinking it were not enough.

"Hello," I had forgotten to watch for Sadie on the road, and there she was beside me in her tight blue coat with the velvet trimming, and her small felt hat that looked as if it were going to take to the air from her head. She had grown very plump in the last years and she was puffing, not being used to long walks. "You been waiting long, Kate?"

"No, not very. I had to look in the schoolhouse, Sadie, it makes me feel funny, sort of, seeing our old desks and the poets and all."

"It don't make me anything but thankful school's over and done with for me." She pulled me away from the window. "Come on, let's go round to the back, out of this wind."

We found a more sheltered place and stood close together with our backs to the clapboards. Neither of us spoke again for a minute, but Sadie searched my face as if she expected me to be changed. It came over me in a rush that I must have looked at

her in just that way once, almost in this same spot. I gave a laugh that didn't sound like mine.

"Oh, Kate," she said, and her face got all puckered as if she were going to cry, "I've been most distracted about you lately. I had to see you some way. I can't get it out of my head how queer it's turned out,—first me and now—it's you they're all putting their heads together and whispering about."

"I know,—it's like a see-saw. Well, I guess I know what they're saying. I knew beforehand, soon's Nat got back."

"Listen, Kate, don't go and think I'm getting preachy or anything like that, but 'tisn't the same for you. I mean, I was the flighty kind and I paid up for it all right. You're made different—"

"Don't you think I've got the same feelings as other women?" A sudden bitterness overwhelmed me. "Don't you suppose I can love, too?"

"Oh, Lord, yes, Kate, that's what I mean. You've always had too much and no one to spend it on all these years."

"Well then," I drew in a long breath of the cold air and felt better again, "that's all right. I thought you'd know how it was. I didn't have to tell you, Sadie."

"But it's bound to get you into trouble sooner or later, and you're in deep enough now."

"I'll take whatever's coming. I wouldn't call it trouble if it—if it was Nat's and mine."

Her face grew a shade redder.

"If you had one, I'd be glad, too, in a way, and I'd help you through same's you did me. But I didn't mean only that, Kate,—"

"I guess you heard what I said to Mr. and Mrs. Dearborn when they came over."

"Yes, and I wish you hadn't sassed 'em that way. I don't mean just because he's the minister. I've got no use for that pair, specially her, but you've gone and stirred up everyone. The things they're spreading round about you and Nat Fortune,—are just awful."

"You don't have to tell me! Maybe if Mr. Dearborn had come alone I could have behaved different. It was the two of them sitting in the carriage so sure of themselves and their love, that set me off. Well, the most they can do is talk and that won't kill me, I guess."

"No, but it's Jake I'm worrying about. That's what I came to tell you. He and his wife are pretty thick with the Dearborns and they're all up in arms about you. I think Jake's still sore at you for turning him down. He'd like to think you couldn't ever have anyone else, and seeing it's Nat Fortune,—well, you know how he's always been about that family."

"Yes, but still, I don't see what he can do."

"He's got Rissa's note on *The Folly*, and she hasn't paid any interest the last two quarters it was due."

I was glad of the solid boards behind me. I leaned hard against them before I could question her.

"Are you sure, Sadie? Certain?"

"It's what he's saying all over town. He says he'll have *The Folly* inside a couple of years if she don't pay up quick. He's got his plans all made for it already. He's going to live in it himself and build some sort of a place below on the water for shore dinners. Fortune's Finish somebody said he'd ought to call it. Lord, Kate, don't look like that! He ain't done it yet. He's only cabled Rissa about the money."

"When did he do that?"

"Why, I don't know exactly. He didn't say it to me. He knows I won't stand anything against you. But it's all round now."

"Then that's how she found out Nat was here. I might have known it was Jake's doing."

"Well," I could see she wasn't following me. "There's just one thing to do now and that's to pay him that interest right off. I thought you could get it from Nat."

"Why, Sadie, he hasn't got any that I know of. Besides I couldn't get him worried about this now. He'd go all to pieces again."

"Isn't there anybody could help you out?"

"Dick Halter would. I'd just as soon as not ask him to pay it and say it was from Rissa. I'll get a letter written to him tonight."

"You do it, Kate, don't you give Jake Bullard any chance."

"I won't if I can help it. Money's tricky, though, I never could seem to get the hang of it."

"It can play the mischief all right if you haven't got any. It's funny, too, you'd have had plenty if you'd married Jake. Don't you ever think of that?"

"Not that way I don't. But when Nat came back, all I could think of sometimes was how I'd have felt if I'd been tied to Jake. It scares me how near I came to missing him."

"Well, I guess I don't need to worry about *that* part of it," she pulled her collar up closer and peered at me again. "You know, Kate, anybody could tell to look at you how it is—." I flushed under her kindly scrutiny, and she smiled. "You're real handsome, even in that old rig. Well, I've got to hurry back. I don't trust Louis to close up the post office."

"You were good to come, Sadie. Here's a package of cookies for Orion. I cut some out like animals on purpose. You tell him for me. Good-bye."

I watched her head towards the village before I set off in the other direction, my mind already turning over phrases for the letter I must write that night. The wind blew hard at my back all the way, but it seemed less the wind than Time itself, following on my trail. Even when I put The Folly door between us, I knew it was just outside, only waiting a chance to come in.

After my letter to Dick Halter had gone the next day I felt easier, though the new worries Sadie had started kept nagging at me when I was alone. Nat was busier than ever. Even the notes that stuck on the piano couldn't stop him or his supply of musical paper giving out. He sent away for more and I helped him rule old sheets that had lined bureau drawers to make shift till the new ones came.

"You're good at that," he praised me, "lots more patient and careful than I'd be."

"It's sort of like driving the furrow along a field, breaking long straight rows for the seeds to take root in," I told him. "That's what your notes seem like to me, little black or white seeds."

"Seeds of sound, that's nice." He nodded his dark head till his hair fell into his eyes the way it used to when he was little and things pleased him. "Well, they're not going to get away from me this time,—no drought or blight or crows to do us out of them."

Oh, but he was sure and jubilant that day! It was a wonder to see him; to hear him working out now this part and now that, calling to me now and then to come and hear, just as if I wasn't listening from the kitchen.

Sometimes I have to think how it might have been if Dick Halter had not been away in the west on that trip while my letter was following him from place to place. But that has no part in what I must set down on these pages. It was mid-December when I found the yellow telegraph envelope in the mail box. It had come the evening before and this was the first chance the office had had to send it. Just for an instant I thought it might be for me from Dick Halter. But it was addressed to Nat and I knew Rissa had sent it. I felt numb and old as I hurried back to The Folly. Nat was bending over his ruled sheets, intent on setting down the little notes. I had never disturbed him at that before, but then I knew I must.

"Nat," I said, coming over beside him, "how near done are you?"

He started up, rumpling his hair into a great shock.

"Done?" He repeated. "Why, I don't know. It's all here, but very rough still. I'll need quite a while to get some of the harmonies just the way I want them, and I haven't worked out all the parts yet. What made you ask me that all of a sudden?"

I handed him the telegram in answer. He read it through at a glance, and then more slowly before he put it in his pocket.

"It's from Rissa," he said, "she's on her way."

"You know what that means."

"No," his arms were round me, but I could feel the old tenseness taking him again. "It won't make any difference between you and me. Rissa wants me to be happy——"

"In her way, Nat. She'd go through Hell's fire for you, but she'd have to be the one to do it. Oh, Nat," I clung to him as I never had in all the days and nights before, "I did think we could have a little while longer together."

"We will. We will."

It was his turn to be comforting, but already I caught a different sound in his voice, something tight and frightened that I knew too well. I had been on the point of getting down Rissa's letter and confessing how I had kept it. But I guessed that would only mean more blame for him to take. I would answer for that.

"You trust me, don't you, Kate? You know how I feel about you,—about us?"

"Oh, I do, dear, and I love you—always, no matter what."

So we tried to reassure ourselves, though even as our lips found one another's warmth I knew, and I think Nat did, too, that the tide had turned for us.

She drove in long before we had counted on her coming. She had hired a fast pair and carriage to bring her from the train and my heart sank as I saw the driver hand out one slim bag instead of the usual trunk and valises. I saw that from the dining-room window, for I wouldn't come out with Nat when we heard the wheels. Maybe I was wrong in that. I might have done better to face her first, since there could be no easy meeting between us. I went back to the kitchen, moving dishes and rattling stove lids with the body's accustomed activity. I tried to think; to summon words to use against her when she came, but I felt overwhelmed and helpless, like that old King Canute we used to read about in the history book, trying to ward off the sea with his words.

I stiffened and turned from the stove at the swish of her silk skirts.

"Well, Rissa, how are you?" I threw the first stone in those meaningless words of greeting.

"Never mind that, Kate," she swept them away contemptuously, "we're past having to be polite to each other. I want to know how long this has been going on between you two?" *

"Why he came back the last of September, but he was pretty sick then you know."

"I don't know a lot of things that I ought to have been told." Her voice was icy and I couldn't help noticing how she had changed in those months. Not that there was anything exactly different about her that you could put your finger on,—the delicate features had kept their lovely shape, but already there was something brittle and dry about them. She was like a spray of mignonette artfully pressed between the pages of some old book. She wasn't far along in her thirties and yet the quick sap of youth was gone out of her.

"Rissa," I began, "you'll never know—. He was kind of out of his head when he came."

"Just the time to take advantage of him the way you did. I always suspected you weren't so simple and dependable as the rest thought. But I never would have believed it could go so far and after all you've had from us. Why, you've lived off the Fortunes since you were ten years old."

"And worked for them without any pay for the last ten, don't you forget that either while you're at it! Rissa, I know how you're bound to feel. I would too, I guess, if I was in your place, but you've got to believe what I say now. He didn't want you when he came back, he wanted me."

"He wanted Dora Drake once, and look what that did to him. Don't you suppose I know what's best for Nat? Do you think there's anything I wouldn't do for him?"

"All right then, leave him alone. That's what he needs most now."

"You don't seem to be practicing what you preach."

"I won't try to keep him when the time comes for him to go."

"You won't have to wait long then. We're off tomorrow."

"Rissa, you can't take him yet. I promise you I won't stand in his way when he wants to go. I don't expect you to understand why we,—that he could care about me. You're hard on everyone except Nat, and that's why it seems as if you could give him his chance to—to get right again in his own way."

"Enough time's been wasted now," her face had sharpened and her chin stuck out the way the Major's used to when his mind was made up about anything, "I mean to see he goes to the best doctors there are. I don't care if it takes every cent I have left. I wrote him so in that letter he says he never got."

"It wasn't his fault about your letter." I went over to the shelf and pulled it out. "I didn't dare give it to him when it came. He was just beginning to crawl back to something like himself."

"I suppose you know it's a crime to tamper with mail?"

"Yes, I do, but it isn't any crime to love a person so much you'll do anything to save him."

"For yourself,—no, you don't have to explain." Her eyes were all black pupil except a narrow ring of cold gray. "But you've done him enough harm already."

"I haven't, and you can't change what was right and—and beautiful into something ugly and wrong because you say so."

"It doesn't seem to occur to either of you that all these weeks you've been living here together under my roof. The Folly's still mine."

"It won't be much longer with Jake Bullard after it."

"He's welcome to take it. At least I've got him to thank for finding out Nat was here. If he hadn't cabled me about that interest and said he'd tried to see Nat and couldn't——"

"Jake's never forgiven me, not even now, and he won't stop till he can set himself up here in The Folly. But you can't just let it go like that, Rissa, you could get Dick Halter to help you out."

"I don't need any help from him or from you either. You've done enough between you to turn Nat against me. Why, he could have been dead and buried for all I'd have known——"

"I wish I were, God knows!"

We both turned at the sound of his voice behind us. I don't know how much he had heard, but there he stood, still and chalk white in the pantry door. Rissa held out the unopened letter.

"You see," she told him, "I was right. Kate had it here all the time."

He took it from her mechanically and stuffed it in his pocket.

"Maybe it was wrong of me, Nat." His eyes met mine and I felt weak before their troubled darkness.

"You two wrangling about me," he said, and I can't forget the hurt reproach in his voice, "just as if I were a bone or something."

"Nat, don't say that,—I only did it so you could finish your music, not—not just for us the way she says."

"All right," he spoke flatly and turned away, "you don't have to worry about me and my music any more. I'll fix that!"

Something about the way he said that sent a chill all over me. Rissa must have felt it, too, for we turned at the same instant to follow him. I saw the same shocked fright on her face that I knew was on mine.

But he was too quick for us. Before I had got to the east parlor door I saw the fire blazing bright in a tell-tale flare. He had thrown all the papers on at once, but I ran and snatched out a few sheets that had fallen to one side. I didn't feel the burn on my hand till afterwards, though I carry the scar yet. All I can remember is seeing those little notes being swallowed up in flame.

"Oh, Nat," I heard Rissa crying, "how could you do it?"

"I don't know," the words came out brokenly behind the hands he had pressed to his face to hide the light, "I guess I must be crazy, the way you said."

"I never said such a thing. I only wanted you to go to that doctor. I thought he could——"

Nat slumped down on the sofa with a groan. I pushed Rissa aside and dropped to the floor beside him, forgetting even the charred papers I still held. Rissa stood over us, but I was past

caring if she listened or not. I know now that nothing could have hurt her so much as our going on, just as if she hadn't been there.

"Nat," I begged, "you've got to listen to me. I pulled some out,—see, and you can write the rest again. It all came out of your head, and it's still there, isn't it?"

"I don't know." He stared down at me in a sort of bewildered misery that wrung my heart. Such pity for him came over me that he must have seen it there on my face in spite of all I could do. He turned away from me with the same look I remembered from the time they sent him off on the "Rainbow". "Don't, Kate," he went on, "don't look at me like that. I hadn't any business to come here and——"

"And make me happy. Yes, we were happy, Nat, you can't deny it. Just because she came and got you all stirred up about what's over and done with. I don't know what she said to you, but she can't take away what we've had, or keep us from being happy again."

"What chance have we got for that?" I could feel him trembling against me. "You were right that day you said it wasn't enough—two people loving each other in an old house, and even the house belongs to someone else."

"We can go somewhere, Nat, there are lots of other places."

"I wouldn't be different wherever we went. The black spells would come on me, like this, and I'd start things and not be able to finish them. I'd spoil your life, too, Kate. I guess maybe I have already."

"You couldn't, Nat. Can't you remember how it was yesterday and the day before? Well, tomorrow——"

"Don't," he spoke with terrible bitterness, "it hurts too much to start feeling and hoping again."

His words ended in a groan.

"Can't you see you're only making him worse," Rissa spoke low at my side. "You pretend to care so much and yet you're trying to keep him from the only chance he has to get well."

I got up and moved away. There was no use in any more

words and I knew it. Our two voices, meeting and mingling above him, would only make it harder in the end.

"I'd better get us something to eat," I heard myself saying and I went out alone to the kitchen.

The kettle was rocking with steam and I went over to the stove and made tea, scalding out the pot and measuring as carefully as if it mattered to any of us. I brought out food and warmed it, knowing that it would stay untasted. My hand throbbed from the burn, and my head did, too. What hurt me most then was that I might have stood out against Rissa if the money had been mine instead of hers. We were helpless, Nat and I, without it. That must have been in his mind or he wouldn't have said that about the house. I think now that perhaps things would have worked out the same if I had been able to take him away. Dick Halter and the doctors seemed to feel so, but at the time I was sure I could have saved him from himself and what happened. I had never minded working hard and being poor before. But the lack of money was a bitter thing to me that day.

I carried the tray in to the east parlor and we tried to go through the motions of eating and drinking. Rissa poured the tea. She was mistress of The Folly again and I was back in my old place. The strong brew went to my head and I saw everything with a terrible kind of clearness, the way they say people do when they are dying. I can remember now just how our hands looked in the firelight and I couldn't but think of Old Lady Phibben and that lucky stone. "Lord child, what a grip you've got!" she had said to Rissa all those years ago, and how she had chided Nat for letting it slip through his fingers:—"That's no way to treat luck, when you've got your hands on it." I could hear the very sound of her voice. And mine, well, she had said I should never hold anything for very long. How had she known then, looking at our young, untried hands, how it was going to be?

I knew, too, as I watched them on either side of me, what I had never admitted to myself before. Those two Fortunes could,

never fit into the pattern of other human beings, as Dick Halter did in his way; as I did in mine. There was something they shared; a difficult heritage that must have been gathering for generations before them. For all that they were so different, the same delicate, high pride marked them both and bound them together. It ran like a fine spun thread of glass between them and other people. My love might warm Nat for a little while and Dick Halter might even have Rissa some day, but this was past our power to reach. They must cherish it against their will, and because they could never be free of its hold, they could never be quite free of each other. Mother had called it "the Fortune in them". Perhaps that is as good a name as any other.

Rissa was less harsh with me now she had got her way. She even offered me some money that evening after we had given Nat the medicine to get him asleep. I was washing dishes in the kitchen when she came and put it on the table.

"I don't want you to be out of pocket for anything you've spent for Nat these last weeks," she said.

A flood of bitterness rose up in me when I saw that.

"You can keep your money," I said grimly, "You're not the only one that's got a right to do for him."

"You'd better take it, Kate. You may need it,—later." I could guess from her look what she meant, but I never let on I did. "I don't want you to be writing or bothering him. You can see he's in no state for that."

"I'll manage all right. I'm used to looking out for myself."

"It doesn't look that way from what I heard in the village."

I might have known she'd stopped to find out what she could on the way. But I didn't answer her. I went on wiping the dishes I had just rinsed.

"I don't blame you for losing your head," she went on, "not the way I do Dora for making him miserable, or Dick for lying to me. I know you've always been fond of Nat, and you saw your chance and took it, only I never would have thought—"

"That he could care for me? Well, he did."

"Sometimes a man when he's—when he's not himself will do

strange things and turn to people who couldn't mean anything to him when he's well."

"And sometimes they find out the ones they want and need most then." I felt all the resentment of years coming out in my voice as I turned on her. "I know what you think of me, Rissa, you don't have to say it. Only when it comes to love,—I guess I know more about it than you ever will."

I saw her wince and two spots of color came into her cheeks. But she gave no other sign that my words had stung her.

"I've ordered the carriage for ten o'clock tomorrow," she went on, "and I'd rather you went down to George and Annie's now and didn't see him again. We can't afford to have another scene like this afternoon's."

"You'd better let me stay, Rissa. You don't know how to keep the fires up and there's breakfast and all."

"I'm asking you to go, Kate. I don't know how I can say it any plainer."

"All right," I emptied the dishpan and wiped my hands. "You can put me out of The Folly. You've got the right to. But you can't make me stop feeling the way I do about Nat, or take away what we've had."

"You can tell George to come and lock up after we go tomorrow," she spoke from the door, "and in case I shouldn't see him, please ask him to keep the keys."

I put away the cups and plates and set out what I thought she might need for breakfast on the table. Then I shook down the fire and piled on coal enough to last till morning.

"Well, I guess this is the end," I said to myself as I got out the lantern. But I didn't believe that. I knew the three of us would come back to Fortune's Folly. I knew it as surely as I knew that the sun would be up again over the islands, and that it would go down behind Jubilee mountain.

CHAPTER XXXIII

WELL, he was gone and there was nothing for it but to take up the old ways again. George and Annie were good to me and asked few questions. They were grateful for the help I could give them and there was plenty for me to do with Annie half crippled from rheumatism. It was a strange winter of big seas and sudden squalls, but with little ice and snow. We brought the cow and chickens down from The Folly barn. The place was deserted save for a wild old cat that couldn't be persuaded to leave the hay loft. I fetched her milk when I came over to wind the clock, for I was still superstitious about letting it run down.

"Take it easy for a bit," George would say, "you'll scour the skin off your hands." Or again, if he found me bending over the stove, "We can eat cold fare a spell, Kate. You go down and stay a night with Sadie. She tells me to bring you every time I see her."

But I had no wish for that. Sadie's kindness and her questions would have been too much for me just then. I only wanted to be all hands and feet, as the saying goes. My heart was frozen over like one of the pools in the road ruts, and all I asked of myself or any other was not to shatter that numbing layer of ice. It wasn't so hard by day, but the nights were a different story. I would lie stark and staring in the narrow bed, with my eyes wide to catch the first prick of morning, while I tried to fight off the memories which are now so dear to me. At first I had hoped there might be a child. It was madness, I guess, the way things were, but it would have been something to plan and to hope for. When I knew that wasn't to be, it seemed as if I couldn't go on, waiting for I didn't know what.

"Give me the spade and pail and let me go and dig clams before the tide's in," I would beg George sometimes when the restlessness would come on me so I couldn't stay indoors.

"But we don't need fresh clams," he would tell me, "and you're like to perish out in this wind. Well, if you're bound to—" and he would watch me go off with an anxious look in his eyes.

Word came from Dick Halter at last. He wrote me as soon as he got back and found out how things were. He wished it could have been otherwise. He was sorry he had not known in time to return. But he was doubtful if he could have stopped Rissa from doing what she did. She had been very angry with him and wouldn't see him for awhile. But now she had let him come. She was almost beside herself with worry over Nat. None of the doctors agreed about the case. One thought it was merely the effect of overwork and that it might wear off; another that his marriage had wrecked him. Still another believed it was a more deep-rooted thing; a sort of break in his brain that wouldn't ever mend right. One wanted this, and another that, and Nat would be almost like himself for a bit and then as suddenly be laid low. For his own part, he was puzzled and not over-hopeful.

"Nat was always strung too tight, Kate [he wrote], you know that as well as I. I can feel something has changed him and I can't believe he can ever be the same again. But I think with you he could be better at least. Rissa and he,—well, you know how they are, and how they wear each other down. They are too much alike, and their very love and understanding is too much for them. Sometimes I think they have made a sort of charmed circle round themselves, that none of us can quite break through, not even you and I."

"Rissa made me promise not to speak of you to Nat. She is very bitter about his coming to you. I have kept my word to her, but Nat and I were alone the other day and he mentioned you. He asked me where the picture was I painted of you in the orchard. I told him it had been sold and then he asked if I had a photograph of it. He said he would like to have it and I will see he gets one, even if Rissa finds

out. I envy you, Kate, even with all you must have gone through. At least you've had more than I.

"I've tried to get Rissa to take money for the house, but she won't hear of it, so my hands are tied. If you need anything, let me know. I will write you of any change, and you must remember I am doing all I can here."

It was such an open winter that a lot of building went on all round Little Prospect. They were bringing a spur of the railroad over from Rockland and enlarging the old steamboat wharf. Jake was very active in all these enterprises and he had been elected Sheriff of the county, as well as one of the town selectmen. A few months before he had put through a plan for making a wider highway to connect Little Prospect with the big main turnpike. There had been a lot of discussion about that, whether the outer or inner road should be chosen. The inner one was in better shape and had the advantage of being less curving and hilly. Besides that there was a good ten miles less to travel and it swung along to meet the road to Bangor. But Jake favored the shore one that ran past The Folly towards Rockland. It was plain to me the reason he had in the back of his mind. He argued that the more a road could keep in sight of the water the more summer people would take it. It would mean money for the town later on. He carried the vote against a good many who have lived to call it a boon since the coming of motor cars, which were unheard of by most of us then. There were rumblings of a war with Spain in the air, but few talked of that. New taxes and improvements and Jake Bullard's notions about making Little Prospect a more important summer resort than Bar Harbor were the only topics that George brought back from Town Meeting.

By mid-March the work on the road had reached almost to The Folly, and in spite of mud and rains a gang of men were out every day with a surveyor. From Annie's kitchen windows I could see them with their instruments and axes. Such a sight al-

ways filled me with dread, though George tried to tell me they wouldn't have to do much cutting.

"Jake's behind them," I told him one evening when they had been about all day measuring, "and I know how he is. He can't see a tree but what he wants to have it down."

I used to prowl about after the men had gone home to see what they were up to. One afternoon it was altogether plain. There were stakes close to the brick gate-posts and ten of the finest spruces had new gashes on their trunks. I called George out to see and he had to admit they were marked to come down. There was plenty of room to have widened on the other side where the land was rough pasture with only a fringe of young spruce and fir to clear.

"Those surveyors must be crazy," George said. "A child could see that other's the easy side to tackle. Keeps the road straighter, too. I'm not the fool about felling trees that you are, Kate, but I wouldn't take down those big ones for nothing and the stumps'll all have to be blasted out. The gate-posts are sure to go, too, if they start using much dynamite. I can't see no reason for it."

"Well, I can!" I told him as we turned back to the house.

The next morning I went out and spoke to the man in charge. He was a stranger to me, from Bangor I had heard. He had his eye screwed to a small brass instrument on three sticks and he was calling out numbers to another man some yards ahead. I thought he looked a little sheepish at my question about the trees and the stakes.

"Why, yes," he admitted, "those trees are coming down. It's kind of a nuisance to run so close to the gates, but that's the orders we got."

"But there's so little to clear the other side," I persisted. "Couldn't it be a mistake?"

"Don't see how it could be. We got told particular. Does seem kind of a pity to chop down the big ones. I'd of taken the other side if I'd had the say."

That noon when I was through clearing up after dinner, I

put on my best coat and hat and set off for the village. I had hardly looked in a mirror since I left The Folly, but I took pains with myself as I dressed. My outfit was old fashioned, but I brushed the roughness out of my hair and there was plenty of color in my face at the thought of what I was going to do. I got out my little beaver muff, too, because it always comforted me to carry it. I couldn't help wondering if Jake would remember helping me choose it that day we had gone to buy our wedding things together.

If he did, he gave no sign when I found him in the office room of his house. His mumbled greeting was no help and he didn't ask me to sit down. But I took a chair by his desk without an invitation.

"Well," I began, holding my hands tight together in the muff. "I guess maybe you know why I had to come and see you."

"No," he said, keeping his eyes on the pipe he was filling with tobacco, "I don't."

"It hasn't anything to do with me exactly," I went on, "but I had to on account of Rissa being away. It's about the road."

"Well, what about it?" He was puffing at the pipe and his face looked heavier than it used to. His mouth had hardened a lot in the last years and his eyes were narrower and less blue.

"They're running it too close to The Folly and taking down a lot of trees. It'll cut way in and there's no need to with plenty of room on the other side."

"Since when did you take to laying out roads?"

"I asked the man in charge and he said those were his orders, but he'd have done it the other way himself. I knew you must have told them to."

"Oh, that's it, is it? Well, you ought to know the town's got a right of way on anybody's land,—Fortune's the same's the rest."

"Jake," I said, leaning forward in the chair and trying to keep my voice even, "I know why you want it to go there. You're counting on getting hold of The Folly. But you haven't any

right to yet. And I thought maybe if I came here myself and asked you,—you might do me a favor because of the way we used to feel about each other."

"Telling me I was a fool once isn't going to make me one again."

"You're hard as flint, Jake," I said, "but it isn't as if I'd come asking for something for myself."

"It's the same thing if it's for him," the color rose dark in his face and I knew all the old grudges were boiling up in him. "I should think you'd have more pride'n to come round to me like this."

"I've got my own kind of pride and I think when it comes to that—"

A sound at the door cut me short and I saw it open on a little girl who came straight in and made for me. She wasn't much more than a baby and not too steady on her feet. My muff caught her fancy and she reached for it with both hands. She wasn't afraid to come over to me and take it.

"Pussy," she said, and laughed at the feel of the fur.

She waved it at her father and then lost her balance. I had her up in a minute, but Jake reached out and took her away quickly. That hurt me and the way he flung the muff back in my lap as if he couldn't bear she should touch anything that belonged to me. He needn't have done that, seeing she might have been mine.

I was glad to get out of the house and go over to Sadie's for a cup of tea after she closed the post office. Louis was kind in his silent way and Orion was housed with a cold and gave me an extra welcome. It was a comfort to watch him put his puppy through its tricks, and I told him about Frisky and how she used to bark at the family portraits.

"He got a good report card at school," Sadie told me with pride, "he's smart for nine."

"I'll be ten next summer," he reminded me.

"That's so, just the age I was when I came to live at The Folly."

"Yes, I can remember the first day you came over to school, with your freckles and short, sandy hair. It's funny the ones you keep along with and the ones you don't." She followed me out to the door. "Oh, Kate, I wish I could make you stay here or go away or—or something."

But I shook my head and set off. I had to beat the early spring darkness back. There had been no use in my errand. Jake would always get his way whether it was with trees or roads or people. But he hadn't with me that other time in his boathouse. That was some satisfaction to remember as I came up the last rise and saw the gashes on the trees sharp, in the failing light. I tried to tell myself that there would still be plenty between the new road and The Folly. But I knew how it would be, you couldn't stop axes once they began. No one was in sight, so I went from one to another, feeling the bark rough and sticky as I laid my hand to each in turn.

"What in high heaven were you up to out there?" George hailed me from across the road.

"Oh, just counting the marked ones over again," I told him. I couldn't have let even George know I was saying good-bye.

The spring equinox passed in wind and rain along with my thirtieth birthday, and not a word from Nat. Then April was in with a bound. I helped George get the garden ready for planting. I raked, and trimmed out suckers from the overgrown lilac and syringa and rose bushes. I uncovered the strawberry patch and marked how well the plants had weathered that winter and how thick the buds were swelling on all the apple boughs. I moved through a world of new green and it no longer turned me wild and despairing. Nat had changed all that for me. I might of necessity walk alone, but I could never be completely hungry and bewildered again.

June brought the first summer families and by early July the cottages were open and the harbor crowded. I had more time for picking and selling my berries than before and I made the most of it. Old customers were friendly in their greetings, though

later I began to notice curious glances and a good many more that were disapproving which made me guess that they had heard plenty of gossip. Still, they didn't stop buying. The only thing I minded was if children were called indoors when I stopped to speak to them or if they hung back as if they had been told to keep away from me.

"She's sort of queer, you know," I heard two girls whispering together after I had passed, "but mother doesn't care because she has the best berries to sell."

"Yes, she gets them up by the haunted house. You can tell it is, it's so white and spooky looking."

Perhaps they were right. Why shouldn't Fortune's Folly be haunted if any place could be?

The Drake's were back again. At the windows there were queer, new-fangled canvas pieces they called awnings, striped red and white, the first in Little Prospect. I saw Mr. Drake and his wife driving sometimes, and Will and his family were out on the water every pleasant day. But Dora hadn't come. Sadie reported that she sent letters from abroad and there were rumors that she planned to get some sort of separation from Nat soon. It would be in all the papers probably and there was bound to be a lot of rumpus because of all their money.

"And they won't spare the Fortune name any from all I can make out," she told me. "I only hope they won't mix you up in it, too, Kate."

And then another letter came from Dick Halter. I found it in the post box one July afternoon when I came back from a long berrying expedition. He had dashed it off in haste to tell me that Rissa and Nat were coming back. Nat had had ups and downs all the spring, but lately he had been worse. He could hardly be roused from his listlessness, though the doctors had tried everything. They advised Rissa to take him back to Little Prospect.

Rissa had telegraphed George that they would be arriving in two days. He and I went up to The Folly next morning and

spent the day making it ready. I was glad of all that had to be done.

"Captain Poole sold that old image of his to a summer family," George said as he helped me uncover the Buddha. "They say he got more'n a hundred dollars and 'twasn't near so outlandish as this one. Rissa'd ought to try and do the same, then maybe she could pay off some of her back taxes."

"You mean to say she owes for them, too?"

"She didn't pay last spring or this one. I thought you knew, Kate."

"I didn't. How long will they let taxes run?"

"Well, I can't say exactly, depends on the person. If a man's had sickness or lost a boat or something like that the town won't take it over till he's had more time. Summer folks they keep right after, but mostly they're good payers. I guess if Rissa went down and did some explaining they'd let it run awhile longer, only she don't take any notice of such things. Acts as if she didn't care."

"You'd better talk to her, George, she won't listen to me anymore. It's bad enough her owing Jake all that interest money without this, too."

"Seems as if a house kind of shows where the folks it belongs to have lost heart," George stared at the flaking paint and shook his head. "The Major'd turn over in his grave to see it now. Still, from the water you can't tell it needs paint and fixings. It's a landmark yet up and down the coast."

"The flower border helps, too," I reminded him, "even if they're only perennials. I think it's almost prettiest now with the oriental poppies out and the lemon lilies and the larkspur just beginning. I hope Nat'll notice."

"He'd ought to. Kate, what's wrong with him, do you think?"

"What do they say is down in the village?"

"Well," he looked sheepish at my question, "they say he's crazy, kind of, and some think it's that voyage played the mischief with him years back. But there's others say the Major's to

blame, being so hard on him and favoring Rissa when they was young. I expect he could have overset his mind with studying all that music, or maybe the Fortune stock's petering out. It's a pity——”

“What is?”

“Lots of things I could name. Well, don't you take it too hard, Kate; there's no telling how he might pick up again.”

Everything was ready and waiting long before the Boston boat whistled off the Narrows. The place looked like old times, for I had hung the curtains so the mended places hardly showed, and moved furniture to hide the worn spots in the carpet. There were fresh flowers in the hall and on either side of the French clock and upstairs in their bedrooms. I had fetched my things back to my old room in the ell, having made up my mind not to ask Rissa if I could stay. I would just be there as if I had never left. I didn't believe she would send me away no matter how much she might resent me. The Folly still belonged to her, but she couldn't live in it without help and she had no money left to buy that. She would have to put up with me now.

George had set off early for the steamboat wharf, his farm horse plodding between the shafts of the least dilapidated Fortune carriage. In spite of all he could do it had a scare-crow cant, and swayed and rattled. I could guess the remarks people would pass on such a rig and I had been half of a mind to discourage his going to meet them. But he had gone and every minute was bringing them nearer. Panic seized me at last, hearing those wheels on the drive, and knowing the time had come.

We met in the hall, and I would give ten years of my life to forget that first sight of Nat's face. Strong noon sunshine struck down from the upper landing so that I was not spared the smallest change in him. Ill and worn and even despondent he had been before, yet not until that moment had I been utterly dismayed.

Somewhere behind us Rissa's voice was going on about heat

and delays and a long, tiresome journey. I heard her words and I think I made some sort of answer. I gave him my two hands and he took them both in the gesture I knew so well. But his look had chilled me through. I could tell the signs of frost no matter where I met them.

CHAPTER XXXIV

EVEN after thirty years the smallest reminder of that summer can shake me to the core, and I have no power to tell of it. For if Nat's malady was baffling to all those city doctors how much more so was it to me? I can only say that he put me in mind of that wild duck I had hung over as a child, when I had found its lax body on the kitchen table. Yes, there was something strangely like about them. No longer the sure winging and the wild blue heights of air for bird or man. All the tautness gone out of the delicate frame-work; only mockery in the unavailing pride, and the same bewildered surprise in the wide-open, glazed eyes. My breath had stirred those limp feathers into a false shimmer of life which had somehow been more terrible than the stillness of death to my young eyes. I had run crying from the sight, knowing, as I was to know long afterwards, how futile was my own warmth against inner chill. But I couldn't run away again. Love can make such hopeful cowards of us up to the last.

From the first night of their return I had felt a difference in Rissa. Anxiety had got the better of her pride. She had to turn to me in spite of herself. We might distrust each other, as indeed we did, but for the time being there was a kind of wordless truce between us.

"I hate you, Kate Fernald, but I need you," her strained, gray eyes always seemed to be saying, and mine must have answered in like fashion:—"As long as he lives we'll have to put up with each other."

Six months before, a few thousand dollars had given her the upper hand. She had had the right to turn me out and take him away. Now it was gone, and I had my way. I might run the

house as I pleased, and I did. She made few objections to that. Rissa was never one to bother where food came from, or how a meal got on the table. So long as I used the white and gold china and kept the silver polished, it was all one to her.

There have been few seasons along the coast of Maine so fair and shining as that one. Blue day followed blue day in a bright procession. The wind stayed west, or if it shifted occasionally to the east, the sun was strong enough to burn off the fog and keep the islands clear. No rain fell from June to late August, and so if I had had time to go on my berrying expeditions I could have found few worth peddling. Those of us with withering gardens might complain, but the summer visitors were well pleased. It seemed made for their doings by land and water. It was small comfort to us in Fortune's Folly to see the loaded buckboards stirring up dust on the new road, or sails whitening the Narrows with gay picnic parties. The sound of voices and laughter coming across the water seemed often like a mockery to us in those anxious days. Rissa minded them most. I think they reminded her too sharply of those she used to go on, and she took her feelings out on any parties that came ashore to picnic in our cove or by the tumble-down boathouse. It was a torment to her to hear them and sometimes she went down herself and ordered them away with sharp words. I used to try to get rid of them for her after George told me how she flew at people who stopped there. She did it for Nat's sake, though he seemed more indifferent to outside happenings than she. I would have welcomed them if they had been able to rouse him.

He stayed indoors most of the time unless I urged him out with me to the garden or woods or orchard. He never said so in words, but I guessed that the familiar shape of trees and bushes and far islands swimming the endless blue, made him feel the more fast caught in his own pit of despair. They still speak of him as crazy, if they make mention of him at all now in Little Prospect. But he was never rightly that, and I should know if anyone does. He took things too hard. That had always been his trouble and he couldn't seem to shake off the sense of his

own failure. Once I remember he tried to speak of it to me when we were alone in the orchard together.

"See," I had pointed out to him, "there are some ripe apples already. I was afraid the drought would do for them."

He nodded and picked one up from the burnt grass. I can see it yet, yellow and freckled, in the curve of his long fingers.

"Yes," he said, "it looks all right, but you can't tell just by the outside,—trouble begins at the core you know."

"Since when did you get to know so much about apples, Nat?" I tried to sound careless, as if I didn't know what he was driving at.

"Don't put me off like that, Kate," he spoke with grave reproach and his eyes held mine, "you know what I mean."

But I was afraid to let him see that I did. I went on filling my basket and he helped me. Half way back to The Folly he spoke again.

"There ought to be some way to tell when it begins, when it's still just a little spot before it spreads and spreads—"

He broke off and shrugged his shoulders under the rough brown jacket he used to wear with such careless grace. He had always been unconcerned about his clothes and yet there had been a difference in the way he put them on. They seemed shabby now, and his hair, though it was as thick and dark as ever, no longer felt full of life when I laid my hand to it. Sometimes a day or two's growth of beard would darken the lower part of his face, as if a bluish shadow were creeping upon him.

I knew that no words of mine would be any help. Even when his body called out to me and mine answered, there was something in him past my power to warm and quicken.

"It's not you, Kate," he said once when we had taken refuge in my old hiding place in the hayloft. "You might as well hope you could bring one of those shells on the mantelpiece back to life. You almost did once—"

He turned his face from me and burrowed deeper into the hay. I could feel him shaking with dry sobs. I touched his hair

and stayed close to him there in the dusty sweetness of dead grass.

"Don't pity me whatever you do, Kate, I couldn't bear that."

So I promised. I couldn't take away his poor remnant of pride by telling him what I had come to know so well: that sometimes pity and love join hands in secret and may not be separated.

During that month of August there were times when his spirit lifted a little. He even went to the piano and played snatches of music. But usually these attempts ended in disaster. He would break off in a crash of discordant notes that made Rissa turn white and sent the swallows twittering in alarm from their nests under the eaves. That must have been what passersby on the road heard and turned into a story of mad, tuneless playing coming out from The Folly. Sadie told me so long afterwards, though I guessed as much from the way children scurried by with scared looks when I went down to the mail-box by the road.

"It's the piano, Nat," Rissa would insist after one of these outbursts, "We'll get the tuner over right away."

"You needn't bother to. The fault's not with the keys and you know it." He would answer her, and it would be days before he could bring himself to touch it again.

I found him once poring over some newspaper clippings about his Symphony that had been stowed in one of his desk drawers. His hand shook as he held them out to me.

"'Nathaniel Fortune,'" he read off with terrible distinctness, "'promising young composer'—looks that way now, doesn't it?" And he gave a short laugh that came up hard and hollow as a sob.

"You did it once, Nat," I told him. "I was there and I heard every note of it. I saw you stand up in front of everyone with that black stick in your hand. I won't let you act as if it wasn't so, or as if it couldn't be so again."

We were alone or I shouldn't have dared speak out like that to him. He thrust the clippings back and sat staring up at me.

"If anyone could make me believe that, you could, Kate."

Those were his very words and I cherish them as much as any he ever said to me.

There can be no use now in thinking how things might have turned out if the weather had been less sultry that last week of August, or if I had not been out with a load of apples the afternoon Mr. Drake came over to The Folly. I have a feeling I might have put him off. At least Rissa would not have answered his ring, with Nat just behind her in the hall. Mr. Drake, from all I could find out from her later, had come over to say his say, and he wasn't one to mince words. In his opinion Nat deserved to be put in jail, or worse, for the way he had treated Dora. He accused him of being scheming and lazy, of marrying for money, and then of leaving his daughter without reason to make a scandal of himself with me. I can guess what he must have said though Rissa was too shaken to repeat his exact words. Nat took it quietly at first. Perhaps he had had one or two such scenes with the dictatorial old man before. But to hear Nat blamed and threatened and to have Dora made out an injured angel was too much for Rissa's pride. She rushed to her brother's defense and only succeeded in making their visitor more violent and Nat more agitated. Rissa was no coward and wherever Nat was concerned she could fight like a cat. If words had claws Mr. Drake would have gone down in shreds before her. He had brought things for Nat to sign, divorce papers or such, and others to keep him from money claims. Nat had been willing enough, for by that time I think he would have set his name to anything. But Rissa saw to that. The story goes she drove their guest out with one of the silver candlesticks. Mr. Drake always said it missed his head by an inch or two, though according to Rissa she only caught it up to emphasize her words and her hands shook too much to hold it.

She was still shaking when I returned. I found them both in the east parlor, Rissa, looking more like Major Fortune than she ever had before, and Nat slumped over the open piano, staring at the black and white keys as if they were altogether

strange to him. I think that was when my heart failed me: when I knew nothing short of a miracle could save him.

That night I sat late by my open window writing a letter to Dick Halter. I couldn't see any other way for us, even though Rissa would be furious if she found out I had meddled. All the old associations with Dora and her family had been stirred up that afternoon and the shock of such a scene couldn't but make him worse. Then I had stopped in to see Sadie on my way home and she had told me disquieting rumors about Jake and that note on *The Folly*. It seemed he had filed some notice about the whole amount and back interest being paid or he would take the place over in three months' time. Sadie was hazy about such matters but she knew from what they said he meant business. Rissa would have to act quickly to keep the property. I knew she had been down to see Jake once, but she was past caring what became of the place. It was hard to put it all into words with my head pounding and my ears strained to catch any sound from the front hall. The night was sultry, with hardly a breath from the water. Insects thudded at the window screen, drawn by the light of my oil lamp. My fingers were hot and sticky as I pushed the pen across the paper.

"It can't go on this way much longer [I wrote at the end] something is bound to happen and I'm afraid of what it may be. I wouldn't mind anything if Nat could feel right about himself again; if the music could take him just once the way it used to. I was never really afraid like this till tonight, but maybe that's only because there's thunder in the air. Please come as soon as you can."

When it was sealed and stamped I thought I would go down to the mail box and leave it. I might not have a chance to before the postman came and I wanted to have it go tomorrow. Things were quiet in the house and I had not yet taken off my clothes. There was no moon when I let myself out of the back door, but I knew my way down the drive without need of a lantern. My feet found the ruts easily and I made no sound on the fallen

needles. It was a relief to slide my letter in the box and I lingered a moment, watching the lights of summer cottages along the Creek and on Porcupine Head and the nearer islands. The farmhouse across the road was dark. I knew George and Annie had been asleep for hours though it wasn't much after ten. I turned to go back again, but no sea breeze met me. The air felt heavy as lead on my chest, and a fork or two of heat lightning showed over beyond Whale Back Light.

"That storm ought to break soon," I told myself, "I wish it would hurry up and get through."

Then I remembered some shears and a trowel I had left in the garden. I had meant to get them when I came back before supper, but the sight of Nat had driven everything else from my mind. I was sure I had laid them down just under the east windows where I had been cutting the hollyhocks and larkspur that were through blooming. To this day I call it Providence that sent me after them, for how else should I have seen that prick of light moving in the parlor? It was a candle and I could just make out Nat's figure through the window. He was over by the piano again, sitting there limp and still as he had been that afternoon. His hands rested on the keys, but they made no sound.

"Nat," I said, and I saw him start at his name. "I'm out here," I went on, "come over to the window seat."

It was a low window and I climbed up to the ledge while he crouched on the cushions inside.

"I couldn't sleep," he said in a far, flat voice.

"Neither could I, the air's so heavy."

But I could tell he wasn't listening to me. His hand felt lax and chill in my hot one. After those two flashes and the warning rumble, the night had grown still again, so still that not a leaf or a branch or a grass blade stirred anywhere. I could hardly hear the sea shuffling pebbles in the nearest cove. A breathless, watchful dread seemed to lie on everything, till I could have believed that the world stood still in space, caught at last in its ageless spinning. Only the French enamel clock broke

silence behind us, striking the half hour with its deep, familiar note.

"Kate," his hand suddenly gripped mine hard, "listen! You hear it, too, don't you?"

"What, Nat?"

"Off there," he was leaning forward tensely, his head tilted towards the trees that edged the shadowy lawn. "I never really believed in him before, but there's his tom-tom beginning to beat."

He swung himself over the sill and dropped to his feet among the plants below us. I caught the sudden fragrance of crushed balm and heliotrope, and even in the dark I made out that his body had taken on something of its old alertness. He was moving away from me. I could tell by the white patch his shirt made and I followed, as close to him as I could keep. Another far roll of thunder sounded and I touched his sleeve.

"Hear that?" There was a thrill of excitement in his voice such as I hadn't heard there since his return.

"Yes,—the storm—" I hardly knew what I was saying, though I heard him breathe harder at my words.

"Not yet," he told me, "that's the third movement, you know."

It came over me then, how it was with him. In some queer way that story of the old Indian Medicine Man calling up storms with his tom-tom had taken hold of him along with the drum-beats of his own Ship Symphony. I don't know how I knew, but I did. It was as if his whole mind was made clear to me in a single flash, like the flicker of lightning that showed his face for an instant, all eager and confident. I hadn't thought I should ever see it like that again, and I cried out to him, hardly knowing what I said.

Somewhere behind us a voice called from The Folly. I knew it for Rissa's, but I gave no answer. I was stronger than Nat and there would still have been time to pull him back to shelter and safety, yet I couldn't have lifted a finger to touch him. I seemed

to be past all power of thought by then, though I knew by some sure, unreasoning sense what I must do. I can't say how it was except that I could no more have held back from my part in what happened that night than the little woodsmen could have helped answering their hourly summons. When the signal came I answered, too, as if I had known long before how it was to be.

A wind had sprung up out of nowhere. Trees began to rock and toss in the teeth of it. Leaves and needles set up a wild clamor all about us that was like a high-pitched echo of the rising sea. A branch snapped off and brushed my face as it fell. I caught at it and ripped away leaves and twigs till it was bare in my hands.

"Nat," I cried, running towards the pale glimmer of his shirt as it moved before me, "wait, Nat, I've found something for you. Wait."

The wind washed the words from my lips before they could reach him, but I pressed on against it. I clutched his arm and he turned. The storm was all round us then, and the thunder growing nearer with every long roll.

"You forgot—the black stick!" My voice sounded faint as a cricket's chirp, though I must have been shouting.

At the same instant another dart of lightning showed him to me, and I saw his face kindle. It didn't matter whether he heard me or not. He knew what to do and his fingers closed round the stick with the old sure grip. I knew then he was out of my keeping, and I stopped being afraid. This was past any miracle I could have thought of, but I saw it and heard it that night. Rissa had failed and I had failed. In spite of our love for him we could not set him free. But earth and air and sea had taken him in their own way. They did not betray his confidence in that hour. They gave him back his music a hundredfold.

I saw him clear in the next flash, his body erect, his shoulders and head flung back as he beckoned and swayed. It was then that a passage I had copied down for the Major long ago came

back from the forgotten page:—“*Hast thou an arm like God, and canst thou thunder like Him? Deck thyself now with excellency and dignity, and array thyself with honor and majesty.*” Those words shook me more than the next peal of thunder.

He had moved across the lawn towards the spindling fringe of trees that edged the bluff. I was some yards behind, for I lost him again and again in the blackness between flashes. Each bolt brought the thunder nearer. It rolled up about him deeper than all the kettle-drums in creation answering his will. Dark branches sawed like the bent arms of straining fiddlers, and the sea was loud on the ledges. Once more I saw him plain. He and the wind were one. He stood fearless and free at last, conducting his unwritten symphony.

And then the storm broke loose.

I can never be sure what happened next, the crash that deafened me, or the bolt of orange that seemed to run along his arm and tip the black stick with fire. My eyes were blinded by the brightness of it. Then there was a wild ripping and splintering of wood, and a smell of hot pitch in my nostrils.

“Nat!” I called, and I heard the fright in my own voice as my hands clutched at emptiness. “Nat! Where are you?”

Rain was pouring down in torrents. I crawled on my hands and knees through the wetness of tangled boughs and pricking needles. I can never forget the panic of those moments before the lightning showed me where he lay, caught under the shattered half of a spruce. His face was clear of the tumbled green. I saw it in that single flash, white and shining as a wet shell. But his head felt strangely heavy when I tried to lift it. I knew, even before Rissa got there with her lantern, that he was dead.

CHAPTER XXXV

MUCH of what followed in the wake of that night is confused to me now, as it was at the time. So, from the little sheaf of newspaper clippings that lie before me, I shall copy off the account of what took place afterwards. The paper is a Bangor one, dated September 3d, 1896, and it reads:

LOCAL WOMAN QUESTIONED IN DEATH OF PROMINENT MUSICIAN STORM TRAGEDY STIRS LITTLE PROSPECT

Residents of Rockland and vicinity have been stirred by rumors concerning the death here in a recent storm of Nathaniel Fortune, of Little Prospect, now being investigated by Sheriff Bullard of Lincoln County. Kate Fernald, 30, a familiar figure in the neighborhood, where she sold garden produce and was until lately employed as caretaker in the Fortune home, appeared at the preliminary hearing yesterday before Justice Preble, to answer complaint brought against her by Miss Clarissa Fortune, sister of the deceased, who accuses her of responsibility for her brother's death.

Because of an unprecedented crowd, which included many members of Little Prospect's summer colony, the hearing was moved into the Town Hall. Miss Fortune, still showing signs of her recent bereavement, and supported on the arm of Sheriff Jacob Bullard, testified that for some months past she had been aware of an intimacy existing between the accused and her brother. Miss Fernald, she claims, had brought undue influence to bear upon him during a period when his mental and physical health were greatly undermined. In her testimony she dwelt at some length upon the part her family has played in the annals of New England shipping, and upon her late brother's musical gifts and achievements. Although he was the fourth to bear the illustrious name of Nathaniel Fortune, which three earlier generations

have made world famous in Maine-built sailing vessels, poor health had not permitted young Mr. Fortune to continue in the family calling. He had, however, devoted himself to musical composition, and his "Ship Symphony" when performed in New York City some years ago, brought him considerable acclaim. His marriage to Dora Drake, daughter of Henry T. Drake, one of the most prominent members of Little Prospect's summer colony, was a brilliant social affair. Miss Fortune admitted upon questioning that the couple were estranged and had been living apart for the past year or more. Miss Fortune also stated that she had returned with the deceased upon the advice of physicians, in the hope that sea air would benefit his health.

She testified that she and her late brother had retired about nine thirty on the night of August 23d, but that an approaching thunder storm had awakened her. Receiving no answer when she spoke at his door and finding the room empty and his candle left burning in a downstairs parlor, she became alarmed and searched the house. This revealed that Miss Fernald's bedroom in the kitchen-ell was also empty, and she became convinced that the maid had spirited her brother away from the house. According to her story Miss Fortune took a lantern and braved the storm, which by that time had reached its height. One bolt of lightning struck a tree to the east of the house and she distinctly heard Miss Fernald's voice calling her brother by name. Shortly after she came upon the two, her brother dead in the arms of the accused. Miss Fernald, she further testified, did not show signs of proper grief, and could give no coherent explanation for her failure to get the deceased to a position of safety. "I had to let him go," Miss Fortune quoted her as saying. "He died happy, and I'm glad he went that way."

Sheriff Bullard then testified that he was summoned to the Fortune place early the following morning by George Button, farmer, at the request of Miss Fortune. When he arrived at the residence, locally known as "Fortune's Folly", he found the two women alone with the dead man. He corroborated Miss Fortune's testimony, and added that Kate Fernald seemed lacking in expressions of grief, although it was well known in the neighborhood what her former associations with the late Mr. Fortune had been. Miss Fernald, he said, had taken less and less part of recent years in the affairs of the town. He said she was considered to be something of a recluse by summer residents, and that her behavior was becoming unreliable and eccentric. On one

occasion she had tried to interfere in certain business matters which he and Miss Fortune were discussing, and when he had come to investigate Mr. Fortune's death she had avoided him and refused to divulge her part in the affair.

County Coroner Morris followed Sheriff Bullard with his medical report. He testified he was sent for later that day, and that he made an examination of the body and found a fracture of the left leg above the knee and evidence of internal injury such as might have resulted from the falling of a tree struck by lightning. There were no other marks with the exception of a small burn on the right hand, which seemed to indicate some slight contact with a bolt of electricity. He gave it as his opinion that death could have been caused by these injuries or by the effect of shock, since the victim was known to have been subject to heart attacks in the past.

The courthouse was filled with a large crowd of visitors, including many of the summer residents who have shown unusual interest in the investigation. The hearing will be continued tomorrow.

And from a later account of September 5th, which reads:

FORTUNE-FERNALD INQUIRY CONTINUES
IMPORTANT TESTIMONY BY NEW YORK ARTIST
KATE FERNALD TESTIFIES IN OWN DEFENSE

Before a hall packed with interested spectators, Kate Fernald this afternoon answered the questions put to her by Justice Preble as to her part in the accidental death of Nathaniel Fortune. The tall, strongly built woman, who has listened without evidence of emotion during the hearing in which her former employer, Miss Clarissa Fortune, brought witnesses to prove that she was responsible for the late musician's death, was the last to be called upon in the hearing. The dignity of Miss Fernald's bearing and her direct and simple answers to all questions did much to win the sympathy of her listeners who seemed impressed by her evident sincerity.

The morning was occupied with questioning of neighbors and friends of Miss Fernald, who rallied to her cause. George Button, sixty-nine-year-old farmer and caretaker of the Fortune property, testified that he had known Kate Fernald from childhood as he had also known the Fortune brother and sister. He gave her a good char-

acter and said that for the past ten years she had not to his knowledge received pay for her services to the Fortune family, though she had continued to work for their interests whether the place was occupied or not. He admitted that she sold fruit and berries grown on the estate, but added that such earnings as she received were small and entirely the product of her own efforts. "That orchard wasn't fit for much till she got after it," he maintained stoutly. "After Major Fortune died she kept the place hanging together some way for those two to come back to when they pleased." He admitted that Miss Fernald and Sheriff Bullard had at one time planned to marry, but that since their troth had been broken the latter had done everything in his power to "get back at her." Button, when questioned about her associations with the late Mr. Fortune, claimed that the young musician had returned alone and ill the September before and that Miss Fernald had moved back to The Folly to care for him. "She nursed him back to his senses again, that's all I know," he told Justice Preble.

On the night of the tragedy he told how he was roused by the thunderstorm and how when he realized that a bolt had struck nearby he hurried out to see if everything was right at The Folly. He got there in time to help the two women get Mr. Fortune's body back to the house. When it was apparent that he was dead, he followed Miss Fortune's instructions and went after the Sheriff in his wagon. Upon being questioned as to how he explained the tragedy, the old man evaded an answer:—"If Nat Fortune was with Kate Fernald, he was in good hands, storm or no storm," he wound up his testimony.

His wife, a frail woman whose deafness made questioning difficult, corroborated her husband's statements and also praised the accused's character.

She was followed by Richard Halter, prominent New York artist whose appearance created a stir among summer residents. Mr. Halter, a thick-set man in his middle thirties, with spectacles and a beard, spoke in a slow, steady voice, and was listened to with great attention. He described himself as a portrait painter of New York City, and a friend of long standing of the Fortune family. He explained that he had left at once for Little Prospect upon receiving a telegram from Miss Fortune informing him of her brother's death. He found her in a very overwrought state, he said, and did what he could to relieve her by taking over the arrangements for her brother's

burial. Miss Fernald, on the other hand, he had found quiet and collected and it was from her that he was able to piece together a clear account of the accident which caused Mr. Fortune's death. Questioned by Justice Preble as to his opinion of Kate Fernald's character, he said he had always held it in high regard. He had found her, in the dozen years of their acquaintance, to be unusually loyal and honest in her dealings with both Miss Fortune and her late brother. He believed her incapable of willfully doing him harm of any sort.

"Did you know the nature of the attachment that existed between Kate Fernald and the late Nathaniel Fortune?" he was asked.

"I cannot say," Mr. Halter replied, "I was not in the immediate neighborhood at the time, but I knew of Mr. Fortune's return to Little Prospect last September, and I considered Miss Fernald capable of caring for him."

"You did not feel it necessary to acquaint his wife or his sister of the situation?"

Mr. Halter was seen to hesitate and glance in the direction of Miss Fortune, who sat listening to his testimony with peculiar attention.

"No," he replied, "I did not feel it was my business to interfere. I have never doubted Miss Fernald's loyalty, and I don't now."

Part of his testimony concerned a letter forwarded to him from New York and written by Kate Fernald shortly before the storm occurred in which Mr. Fortune lost his life. In this letter, which he produced at the hearing, he pointed out that Miss Fernald expressed grave concern for the state of Mr. Fortune's health and that she feared some catastrophe might befall him. She appealed to Mr. Halter for help, which he had been too late to give. He again showed reluctance in answering the next question which concerned Miss Fortune's feelings for the accused.

"She was not always fair in her attitude towards Miss Fernald," he admitted. "Her brother's dependence upon her in the past often made her jealous and unreasonable."

Sheriff Bullard was again called upon to testify about a note for ten thousand dollars contracted with Miss Fortune three years before in which he accepted the Fortune house and shore property as security at regular terms of interest. He claimed that this matter was conducted entirely to Miss Fortune's satisfaction, but that Miss Fer-

nald had made the transaction extremely difficult by her interference. Upon further questioning he admitted that he had recently posted public notices to the effect that continued failure on Miss Fortune's part to pay interest or to reduce the loan would necessitate his taking over the property in payment by the last day of November next. This, he reiterated, had nothing to do with his previous testimony. As Sheriff, he insisted, he was only doing his duty by seeing that Mr. Fortune's death was properly investigated.

Justice Preble then called upon Kate Fernald as final witness, and there was considerable stir as she rose to answer the charges. Nothing could have been in greater contrast than the appearance of the two women involved. Miss Fortune, slight and pale and showing signs of her recent bereavement, leaned forward tensely in her black dress and veil, while her former maid, buxom and sunburned, in a blue dress of old fashioned cut and a straw hat pushed back on her sandy hair, gave her account of the tragedy. Miss Fernald's testimony is printed as follows:

Question: How long had you been employed in the Fortune family?

Answer: I've worked for them ever since I was sixteen or so,—some before that. My mother was housekeeper till her death three years ago.

Question: And you were paid regularly for your services?

Answer: Not in money, no, sir. I had my board and keep for what I did.

Question: And you sold things to summer people? Fruit and vegetables you raised on the place there?

Answer: For about three summers, yes. But not garden things, it was mostly berries that grew wild and apples from the orchard.

Question: And you had permission from Miss Fortune to do so?

Answer: She never asked me not to. She wasn't at The Folly much, just now and then.

Question: You and she and her brother were on good terms always?

Answer: Well, sometimes she and I had our differences about things.

Question: What sort of things?

Answer: I didn't want her to take that money from Jacob Bullard. I tried to stop her signing the paper.

Question: And you three had an argument about it?

Answer: Yes, sir, we had words, but it didn't do any good.

Question: Did you try to stop her doing so because of your own interests, or because of her brother?

Answer: No. The place was hers, and she had a right to.

Question: Then her brother, Nathaniel Fortune, had nothing to do with this loan on the property?

Answer: No, sir, The Folly didn't belong to him, and he was away anyhow then,—on his wedding trip.

Question: You say you sometimes had differences with Miss Fortune. Did you ever have any with her brother, Nathaniel Fortune?

Answer: I can't remember any.

Question: You were acquainted with his wife, too, were you not?

Answer: I knew her to speak to, that was all. She never stayed at The Folly.

Question: How long had they been married before you became aware of any trouble between them?

Answer: Not quite two years, I think. The first time they came back to Little Prospect.

Question: You saw a good deal of him at that time then?

Answer: Well, he liked to come over and work at his music in The Folly. He would be at the piano for hours.

Question: And you and he were alone in the house together?

Answer: No, sir, Henry Willis was up in his room, that was before he died.

Question: And Mrs. Fortune, didn't she used to come with her husband?

Answer: She brought him over in the carriage sometimes or called for him, but she hardly ever came in.

Question: That left you plenty of time to see Mr. Fortune alone, didn't it?

Answer: Well, I was pretty busy, I had Mr. Willis to take care of and I was going round selling apples three afternoons a week besides.

Question: Did Mr. Fortune tell you he was unhappy at that time?

Answer: Not then. Not in words, he didn't. But I knew things weren't going right.

Question: Did they ever quarrel in your presence?

Answer: Once I overheard them.

Question: What was their difference about?

Answer: She didn't like his spending so much time with his music at The Folly, and he said it was driving him crazy, not being able to work the way he wanted to over at her father's place. He asked her to leave him alone.

Question: And your name was not mentioned in this quarrel you overheard?

Answer: Not right out, no. But she wasn't very polite about me, that's all I remember.

Question: You're sure that's all you remember?

Answer: Only that he wanted to stay on and work another couple of weeks and she wouldn't hear of it. She told him her people were closing their place on Porcupine Head and he was to leave, too.

Question: Did he go then?

Answer: Yes, he went with them the next day.

Question: And you saw him next—when?

Answer: A year later,—I think it was the seventh of last September. He came back alone to The Folly.

Question: What was his explanation of his return alone?

Answer: He didn't say much, just that he and she, Mrs. Fortune, had had some kind of break. I didn't like to ask him many questions because he didn't act like himself.

Question: What do you mean by that,—not acting like himself?

Answer: Well, he seemed sort of out of his head at first. He wasn't sick except in his feelings. He just wanted to get away,—to get back to The Folly.

Question: And you made no effort to notify either his wife or his sister?

Answer: No, sir, I thought they might make him worse. I did write to Mr. Halter and tell him how it was. He said I was doing right to keep him there till he felt better.

Question: How long before his condition improved?

Answer: That's hard to say exactly. It was pretty slow, but in about six, maybe eight weeks, he seemed more like himself, and he started to compose some music about then.

Question: And you two were alone together in the house during all that time?

Answer: Yes, sir, we were.

Question: I see. May I ask if you were aware at the time of the impression you were creating by placing yourself in such a position?

Answer: I knew what people in Little Prospect would think and say.

Question: And was there ground for their suspicions that you and Mr. Fortune were not always circumspect in your relations with one another?

At this point in the hearing a nervous flutter ran through the court and Miss Fortune was seen to drop her eyes to her tightly folded hands. Sheriff Bullard's ruddy face remained impassive as Miss Fernald answered in a steady voice that could be heard by listeners in the farthest row of benches.

Answer: We loved each other, if that's what you mean.

Question: How old were you at that time, Miss Fernald?

Answer: Twenty-nine.

Question: Old enough to know what you were doing?

Answer: Yes, sir.

Question: But Mr. Fortune was not entirely himself, you say? He might not have been wholly responsible for his behavior?

Answer: I can't speak for him, sir. But he did get better. I can swear to that.

Question: When would you say he had fully recovered?

Answer: I said better, not fully recovered. He didn't have that other setback till his sister came the middle of December.

Question: Did you and she have any disagreements at that time?

Answer: Yes, sir, I was against her taking him away with her, the same as she did. I tried to stop her doing it.

Question: You didn't believe then, Miss Fernald, that Mr. Fortune's own sister had his interests at heart?

Answer: In her own way I think she did. But I didn't hold with them.

Question: Yet Miss Fortune has testified that she took him to the best doctors in the country and spent all her money in an effort to restore him to mental and physical vigor.

Answer: I know that, but I never believed they could help him.

Question: You thought you knew more than the biggest specialist in such matters, is that so?

Answer: I knew him better than they did.

Question: Now, Miss Fernald, leaving aside the matter of his health and your personal feelings, I want you to tell in your own

words exactly what happened on the night of August 23d, last, and the manner in which Nathaniel Fortune met his death.

Answer: Well, as nearly as I can remember, they had been back at The Folly about five, maybe six weeks, and he seemed worse to me. Some days he'd pick up a little and try to play his music, but he couldn't seem to do it any more and that would make him low-spirited. He didn't sleep well either, except if she gave him things to make him.

Question: Medicine to make him sleep,—powders?

Answer: Yes, I think so.

Question: Do you know if he had been given medicine of any kind on the night of his death?

Answer: I can't say about that. After supper when we all went to our rooms I stayed up late writing the letter to Mr. Halter. I thought he ought to come, and I was kind of at the end of my rope.

Question: Just what do you mean by that,—“the end of my rope”?

Answer: I was afraid he might really go out of his head and maybe hurt himself. So I wrote the letter and then I went downstairs and out to mail it.

Question: Were you in the habit of roaming about at all hours?

Answer: Yes, sir. But it wasn't much after ten, I heard the clock strike just before. I went the back way so they wouldn't hear me, and when I got outside it was very warm and the air felt like a storm coming soon. That's why when I came back from the mailbox I went round to the east side of The Folly to bring in some garden tools I'd left out there. I wouldn't have seen him in the parlor if I hadn't been looking for those things.

Question: You saw Nathaniel Fortune in the parlor then. Could you see what he was doing?

Answer: Yes, sir, I could see him plainly because there was a candle on the piano. He was sitting on the bench with his hands on the keys, but he wasn't playing or making a sound. I spoke to him through the window. . . .

Question: Can you remember any of the conversation you had?

Answer: He said he couldn't sleep, and I said there was a storm coming.

Question: You just talked about the weather, that was all?

Answer: At first it was. Then there was some thunder, not very

near, and he climbed out of the window and stood by me listening. It sounded like drums to him.

Question: How did you know that, Miss Fernald?

Answer: Because he said so. And then I sort of knew he thought he was doing it . . .

Question: Please be good enough to explain more fully, Miss Fernald, what you mean by that?

Answer: Well, it was like the time he stood up and led his symphony. I knew he thought he was doing that again and I didn't see any harm in humoring him along.

Question: So you humored him instead of trying to get him back to the house or going for help?

Answer: I couldn't leave him alone out there. I kept as close to him as I could till that big crash came. I think the lightning struck him, too, when it took the tree. There was a sort of light on that stick he had in his hand, and when I got over to him, he . . . he was dead.

Question: And that is absolutely all you can tell us of his death?

Answer: Yes, sir, except he seemed happy, the way he hadn't been ever since he came back. That's why I couldn't take on about it, the way (here the witness was seen to look over in the direction of Sheriff Bullard and Miss Fortune for the first time since she began her recital) they expected me to.

Justice Preble then closed the hearing and said that after lunch he would announce whether he would hold the accused for trial.

Reading those words over now makes that day very clear to me again. I remember how strong the September sunlight was as I followed Sadie and George and Annie Button out to their wagon. It was tied a little way from the rest of the teams and we could be quiet there away from curious faces.

"Did I do all right, Sadie?"

"You did fine," she told me with her arm about my waist, "only I just wish I'd had the chance to tell 'em a thing or two. Here's a snack I fetched along this morning, you'd better take the coffee first. George got it hot over to the Inn."

I gulped a cupful down, and all the time the shrillness of early September crickets was coming up about me from the

brown grass. Goldenrod was bright in the sun and I could look off to a polished patch of blue water between the buildings across the road. The woodbine was scarlet round the horsesheds and a mountain ash tree nearby was heavy with orange balls. It seemed, somehow, the strangest part of it all that this should be so. But gradually the sun on my shoulder eased my numbness. It comforted me like a broad, warm hand that asked nothing in return.

"Here, now, you try and eat something, Kate." George handed me an apple that I had seen him rubbing to a shine on his coat sleeve.

"Why, it's one of the Northern Spys," I told him, "I didn't know they were ready to pick yet."

"I'm watching out for the orchard, Kate. I was over there this morning 'fore daylight seeing to the windfalls—"

"Where's Kate Fernald?"

It was Dick Lalter hunting for me. The others went off a little way and left us together. We sat on the wagon seat and talked in low voices. I held the untasted apple in my lap and he twisted a spray of the mountain ash berries between his fingers.

"I wish you hadn't had to take my part against Rissa. I didn't want them to make you do it."

"I couldn't have done anything else, Kate, and if that Judge doesn't have sense enough after the way you stood up and told him the truth—"

"But, Dick, whatever he decides, Rissa'll never forgive you, and now, just when she's alone and needs you. . . ."

"Don't keep worrying about us. Lord, what a day! I'd forgotten what September could be like in this part of the world. What do you call that tree with the berries?"

"Mountain ash. Don't you remember we had branches of it in the tent for Rissa's party?"

It was time to go back to the hall. He kept beside me and Sadie was close behind. I could see by their faces that they were anxious, but I didn't feel afraid somehow. My part was over. It had been over for me the night of the storm. I sat in the

crowded room and tried to listen to Justice Preble talking to Jake. Sometimes I heard our names,—Nat's and Rissa's and mine. They made a sort of pattern, weaving in and out of his words. The whistle of the Boston boat sounded through the afternoon stillness and I knew it was leaving the steamboat wharf. A black cloud of smoke from its funnel showed through one of the windows and I was glad the Major couldn't see it now or know the changes that had come to Little Prospect and were coming to Fortune's Folly.

And then there was a lot of commotion and Sadie pressed close. Dick Halter reached for my hand and I knew, without their telling me, that Justice Preble had decided I wasn't to blame.

And so I came back with Sadie to Little Prospect, and here I have been for upwards of thirty years, watching new houses multiply on every rocky point and island in sight; seeing yachts and launches fill up the harbor each summer, and the roads grow wide and smooth for the throngs of speeding motor cars to travel. Hardly anyone remembers Fortune's Folly as it used to be before Jake Bullard took it over and cut down the last of the spruces; before he built those porches and painted it yellow to match the "Tide Water Tavern" he runs just below it at the mouth of the creek. Only some older man or woman who went to school with me long ago, remembers that Kate Fernald did not always work in the Post Office, sorting out the letters that come and the letters that go, behind the window with its iron grillwork.

To summer people I am part of the place, like Captain Pinker's lobster boat, or Whale Back Light. I've heard them joke about me plenty of times:—"How long have I been back? Well, long enough to hear the fog bell on Old Horse Ledges and see Miss Fernald's new apron!" and sometimes, "Yes, she's a real character, but it's funny she doesn't talk like the rest. I believe there's some story about her, a sort of scandal she was mixed up in years ago, though it's hard to believe of that old maid! I mean to pump our captain someday if I can get him to

throw away his tobacco cud long enough to tell me." But they don't mean it unkindly. Some of them stop to talk when they're not in a hurry to go somewhere, and I've seen a lot of their children grow up and marry. There'll be some little girl or boy too small to reach up to the window and then, in another summer or two it seems, they'll be waiting for letters of their own; looking sheepish and pleased if the right one comes, or disappointed if I have to say "Nothing in this mail." Times like that, I can't get over how queer it is that I should be handing out that kind of letter, and knowing it can never be that way for me again.

Not that I haven't letters of my own now and then. Annie and George used to write me regularly after they moved to Bangor. I missed those letters after they died. Orion writes me, too, sometimes, though it's only natural Sadie should get most of his, especially now Louis is gone and Orion away off in California. Sadie says it's a wonder he turned out so well the way I spoiled him when he was little. But he's a smart man, married, and getting ahead in business. We're both proud of him. Then every Christmas I hear from Dick Halter. Wherever he is, I always get a long letter all in his own handwriting, not one he talks off to some secretary. He never forgets old times no matter how busy he is, and when the War came and Orion went over to France with the troops and hunted him out in Paris, Dick Halter couldn't do enough for him.

I guess there are plenty of times Dick Halter remembers Fortune's Folly, and he has reason to. I'm glad Rissa came round to marrying him at last, though she was never the same after Nat went. She couldn't bring herself to speak or write to me again as long as she lived. But I guess he was happy just doing for her the way he'd always wanted to. It was on her account they went to live in Paris those seven years they had together. Yes, I keep all his letters and I have a scrap book full of pieces I come across in the papers about him and his paintings. Sometimes there'll be a picture of one, and I have them all saved along with those little rough ones he made that first summer at

The Folly. He sent me a sketch he did of Nat that I keep on my dresser. He made a portrait from it for Rissa, but he told me this unfinished one was the best likeness because he did it from life the winter they played his music. Nat looks young and hopeful in it, not happy, for he was never that way for long, but his eyebrow is raised a little and his hair is all dark and rough on his forehead the same as it used to be. I keep it there by the French enamel clock that George got for me along with the log books and some other things before Jake Bullard took over the place and everything in it. I had a right to choose what I wanted. The Major had said so in his will. Sadie wondered that I didn't take something else, furniture or silver or such, but for me those little woodsmen with their cross-saw call up the past with every hour.

Everything else is scattered up and down the coast of Maine and even farther, for Jake made the most of his chances when people began buying up old things a few years ago. That portrait of the first Nathaniel Fortune hangs in a big city museum now, and the second Nathaniel went, too, I've forgotten just where. They say the Buddha that used to sit in the garden belongs to a millionaire on Mt. Desert. But as long as I live they will be secure in their old places where I watched over them year in and year out. While there is anyone left to remember them so, I can't help believing that they exist that way still. Perhaps, even when no one remembers, something of the past stays in them, like the sea that can echo, far inland, in the hollow shell. It must always be there for any listening ear to find. I think Nat would have understood that. It would make him happy, as it would please him to know that sometimes they play his "Ship Symphony." I heard it once again, coming to me across miles of air from a far away concert hall. I knew when I heard the drums begin their familiar beat of hammers on wooden hulls, what I had known so surely that night of his concert and out there alone with him in the storm, that nothing which has ever stirred the heart can be lost to us. So the ripples

spread and widen on the water long after the tossed pebble has gone to the bottom.

It is very late. The house is still, and nothing stirs but the wind from across the Narrows. Only the far prick of Whale Back Light and the lanterns of boats in harbor keep my lamp company. Sadie is asleep downstairs with no notion that my pen dips deep into the well of memory which even she may not wholly share. Nat is quiet over there by the white church, along with the other anchored Fortunes, and Rissa is quiet somewhere, too. Only I am left to fill the last pages of the Major's old log books, and now that all the words are set down on paper they seem poor and meaningless, dry and brittle as weeds left stranded above the tide-line. For it was a strange, high tide that took our three lives and flung them together to mingle in salt and sun and the fierce currents of our youth. There is no way of explaining it, except that I think there must always be Fortunes and Fernalds wherever there are people in the world, whether they go by those names or not.